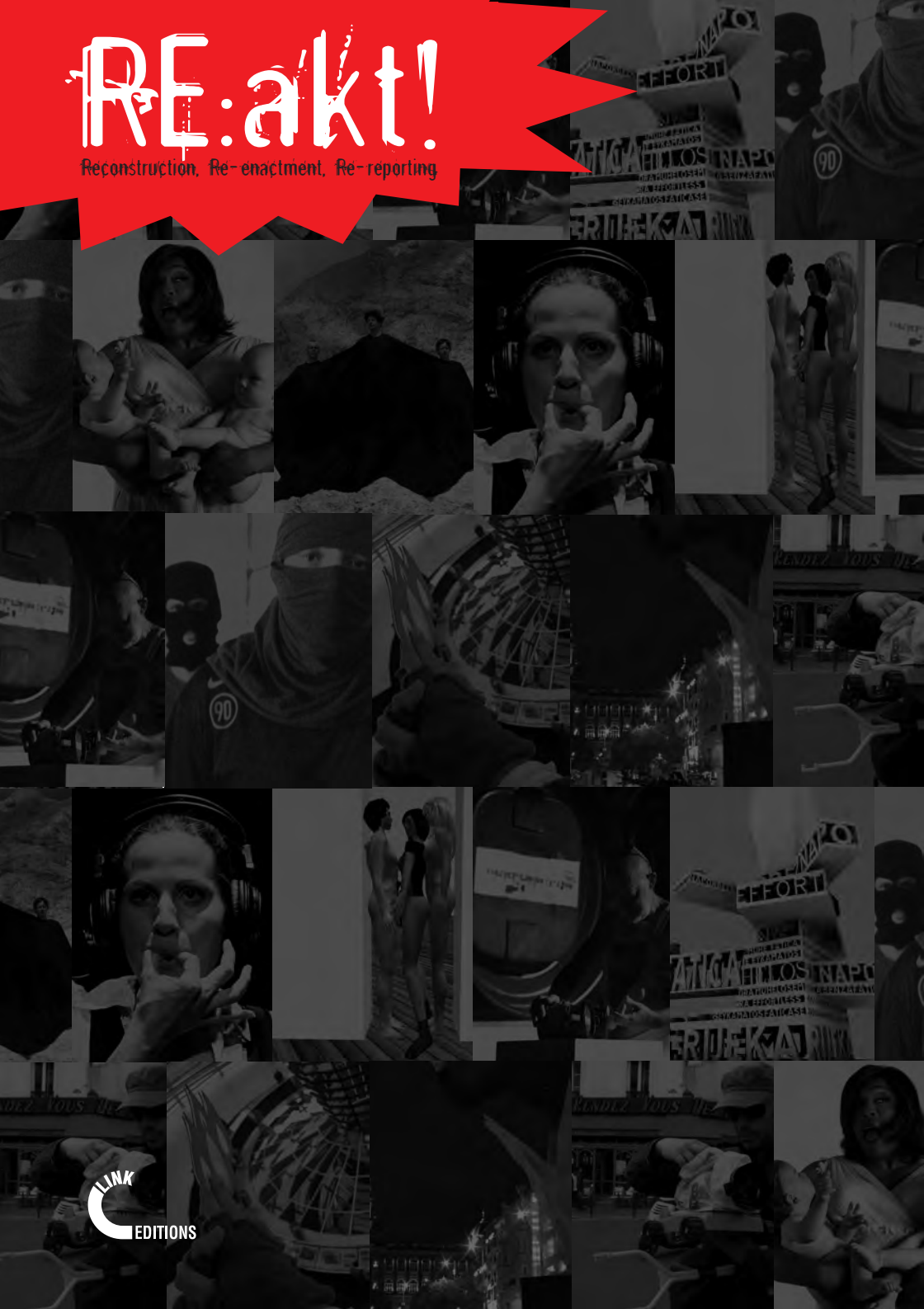
RE:akt!

Reconstruction, Re-enactment, Re-reporting



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EDITED BY

Antonio Caronia, Janez Jansa, Domenico Quaranta

Antonio Caronia, Janez Janša, Domenico Quaranta (Edited by)
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Antonio Caronia

Never Twice in the Same River

Representation, History and Language in Contemporary Re-enactment

ANTONIO CARONIA

Genova 1944 - Milano 2013.
In the 1960s and 70s, while studying mathematics, logic and linguistics, he was a political activist and leader in left-wing Italian groups.
After 1977, he turned to the study of mass culture and communication theory, especially the relationship between science, technology and imagination.
He conducted research in philosophy and anthropology as it relates to science fiction, comics, digital images, virtual reality, and telematic networks.
He worked as a translator, journalist and university teacher, and he wrote a number of books and essays, including: *Il cyborg. Saggio sull'uomo artificiale* (1985; 2008); *Il corpo virtuale. Dal corpo robotizzato al corpo disseminato nelle reti* (1996) and *Universi quasi paralleli. Dalla fantascienza alla guerriglia mediatica* (2006).

Issues regarding re-enactment

Just what is it that leads many contemporary artists to restage historic events great and small, performances of the past, and sometimes even imaginary events? Are they possessed by the post-modern demon? (albeit belatedly...) Does this practice spring from a cynical awareness of the decline of values, the surrender – be it dismal or joyful, it makes little difference – to the logic of the society of spectacle? Is it yet another variation of Francis Fukuyama's bitter prophecy of "the end of history"? Or is it simply the end of the modern myth of the "originality" of the work of art, a further confirmation of the fact that in conceptual art the process is more important than the end product, and an attempt to find a different, deeper path to critique the medial ideology of contemporary society?
This book sets out to offer some answers, albeit not exhaustive or definitive, to these questions linked to the artistic practice of re-enactment, questions which have already been tackled in recent years in the various essays and publications we refer to here. We have not dwelled on the idea of devising an excessively rigid formal definition of re-enactment, or on attempts (necessarily unstable) to classify or categorize the re-enactments themselves, except for reasserting the inescapable distinction between re-enactments of historic events and re-enactments of artistic performances (see Domenico Quaranta's contribution on this point, in this book:*RE:akt! Things that Happen Twice*). Regarding these two points, various interesting contributions have already been written, including the work which goes into the most depth, at least with regards to the second point: the essay by Inke Arns *History Will Repeat Itself*, which is the introduction to the catalogue for the exhibition of the same name.
Our initiative seeks rather to stress the relationship between the historical and social aspects of re-enactment and the linguistic ones, which as yet have been not explored in depth. Indeed, if the phenomenon of re-enactment is closely linked to the "technical reproducibility" of artworks, and is therefore one of the very last outcomes of the "open work" theme within the decline of the idea of "original" in the arts and culture in general, the formal and linguistic aspect is a major concern. This does not happen in the sense of the "open works" of the 1960s and the 1970s, because re-enactments are in general very distant from neo-avantgarde experimentalism; they are rather the expression of a crisis of history: a crisis that emerges at the end of the "great narratives" Lyotard described, but that, as Jan Verwoert remarks in his book (pp. 35-39), does not by any means signify the "end of history". In re-enactments, according to Jennifer Allen, the audience becomes a witness, in whose eyes "the original event becomes historical by taking up time, and claims its status as history by appearing as a discrete event with a finite duration. In other words, the re-enactment makes the event an origin, giving it a definition and an identity that it may not have had for itself." [1] Thus re-enactment aims to turn the shapeless continuity of our chaotic past into a discrete and well-defined experience, for which only repetition and a new reading can provide a possible meaning. But in this process history should not be viewed as closed and prescriptive; as it was for Benjamin, history is a field of possibilities, in which not only the future, but even the past is constantly re-written (and this is particularly manifest in Rod Dickinson's work).

This is why language and reflections about language are so important in the re-enactment field. Re-enactments show their contemporary character in their strong inclination for language, or rather *meta-language*. If re-enactments translate historical, cultural and artistic events from one context into another (they are very often "re-mediations" in the sense defined by Bolter and Gruisin), in doing so they are forced to take language back to a kind of degree zero, stressing its communicative capacity.

Difference and repetition

In the episode entitled "The Convalescent" in the third part of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* by Friedrich Nietzsche, the animals remind Zarathustra of his destiny as the teacher of the eternal return:

> For thine animals know it well, O Zarathustra, who thou art and must become: behold, thou art the teacher of the eternal return,—that is now thy fate!
> That thou must be the first to teach this teaching—how could this great fate not be thy greatest danger and infirmity!
> Behold, we know what thou teachest: that all things eternally return, and ourselves with them, and that we have already existed times without number, and all things with us.
> Thou teachest that there is a great year of Becoming, a prodigy of a great year; it must, like a sand-glass, ever turn up anew, that it may anew run down and run out:—
> So that all those years are like one another in the greatest and also in the smallest, so that we ourselves, in every great year, are like ourselves in the greatest and also in the smallest.
> And if thou wouldst now die, O Zarathustra, behold, we know also how thou wouldst then speak to thyself:—but thine animals beseech thee not to die yet!
> Thou wouldst speak, and without trembling, buoyant rather with bliss, for a great weight and worry would be taken from thee, thou patientest one!—
> 'Now do I die and disappear' wouldst thou say, 'and in a moment I am nothing. Souls are as mortal as bodies. But the plexus of causes returneth in which I am intertwined,—it will again create me! I myself pertain to the causes of the eternal return.
> I come again with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent—not to a new life, or a better life, or a similar life: — I come again eternally to this identical and selfsame life, in its greatest and its smallest, to teach again the eternal return of all things,—
> To speak again the word of the great noontide of earth and man, to announce again to man the Superman. I have spoken my word. I break down by my word: so willeth mine eternal fate—as announcer do I succumb!
> The hour hath now come for the down-goer to bless himself. Thus—endeth Zarathustra's down-going.' [2]

But why do the animals talk about a "great year of Becoming", if everything is going to be the same – if Zarathustra declares he will return "eternally to this identical and selfsame life"? Why, in the passage just before the excerpt quoted above, do the animals say to Zarathustra: "Rather, thou convalescent, prepare for thyself first a lyre, a new lyre! For behold, O Zarathustra! For thy new lays there are needed new lyres"? Doesn't the eternal return mean that things will be repeated identically, without any variations, without any *differences*?
Evidently this is not the case. Gilles Deleuze has returned to this point many times in his works, from *Nietzsche et la philosophie* to *Différence et répétition*.

If Zarathustra needs a new lyre to sing new songs, it is precisely because the eternal return does not mean that the one and the multiple clash, that unity is *ontologically* opposed to difference. On the contrary, following on from Heraclitus, Nietzsche's eternal return is the affirmation that becoming is being, and that the only form of being is becoming. And therefore that the concept of unity is already implicitly affirmed in multiplicity; that it is not a new, opposing form, but merely, to coin a phrase, "the essence of repetition". "It is impossible to step into the same river twice." [3]. Even if it is "the same" river, it is different every time you step into it: this has become a classic example of a phenomenon in which being is, essentially, becoming, and proof of the fact that becoming cannot be identified with disorder, that instability and continuous transformation are not incompatible with the forging and persistence of a "form".
But, "repetition," as Deleuze asserts at the very beginning of his book, "is not generality." [4].
It therefore has nothing in common with either resemblance or equivalence, which seem to govern relations between types. Things that resemble each other or are equivalent can be "distinct" but are unlikely to be "different". When he attempts to base his definition of repetition on "difference without concept", Deleuze makes an observation on the way artists use repetition that can be useful to consider. Repetition, Deleuze argues, cannot be explained in terms of the function of the identity of a concept or representation, but requires a superior "positive" principle which must lie on the border between "the sets of concepts of nature and freedom". To explain this line of thought, he offers the following example:

> Consider, on the border between these two cases, the repetition of a decorative motif: a figure is reproduced, while the concept remains absolutely identical… However, this is not how artists proceed in reality. They do not juxtapose instances of the figure, but rather each time combine an element of one instance with another element of a following instance. They introduce a disequilibrium into the dynamic process of construction, an instability, a dissymmetry or gap of some kind which disappears only in the overall effect. […] It is not the elements of symmetry present which matter for artistic or natural causality, but those which are missing and are not in the cause; what matters is the possibility of the cause having less symmetry than the effect. [5]

Even in the passage in question, Deleuze passes from a specific example (the decorative motif), to artistic procedures in general. The elements of disequilibrium and dissymmetry explicitly present in artistic activity actually feature (to a greater or lesser extent) in all human activities, and are part of that attitude of freedom and "creation" that characterizes man, being present first and foremost in the main tool that the human race uses in its relations and to describe reality (to create the "world"), namely language. In my view one of the most interesting things about the contemporary phenomenon of re-enactment is its very desire to avoid the sandbanks of "representation", and come across as a form of genuine "action", also in terms of the audience, which as Jennifer Allen observes in her essay, is viewed as a witness. All of this is present in many writings on re-enactment, and is effectively highlighted by Quaranta in his essay, where he asserts that "the idea of repetition implicit in the 're' prefix tends to make us forget that the heart of every re-enactment lies not in its fidelity to the original model, but in the differences between the original and the 'remake'." [6].

This alone should be enough to make us reject any interpretation of re-enactment as a "return to order" in contemporary art. Despite the fact that re-enactment undoubtedly participates in the interweaving of art and economy, it still continues in some way to combat the reduction of art to pure economics, more incisively and often more explicitly than other forms of contemporary art. There are bold, broad differences between today's re-enactments and the attitudes and issues of the 1960s and 70s, but these do not cancel the fact that it is impossible to interpret and understand re-enactment without accepting its continuity with the aim of overcoming the representative dimension of art: the aim that was declared and pursued by a part of the avant-garde movements of the beginning of the 20th century, starting with Dada and Duchamp.

From pageant to re-enactment: media and history

On 7 June 1913, in the old Madison Square Garden in New York, an unusual cultural event was held. That evening fifteen thousand people watched *The Pageant of the Paterson Strike*, a "show" that, both on the stage and in the middle of the audience, reconstructed an event that would be difficult to describe as "historic", in view of the fact that in June of that year the textile workers at Paterson (New Jersey) were still on strike. Indeed the strike only ended in August, unfortunately without a positive outcome for the workers. The young John Reed (later to become the most famous "reporter" of the October Revolution) played an important part in conceiving and organizing the event, which was backed by Industrial Workers of the World, the radical, revolutionary trade union which guided the Paterson struggle. Not long after this the union was practically wiped out by the "Red Scare" and the relentless repression of the Wilson administration which eradicated the entire radical movement in America, taking advantage of the jingoistic climate and the emergency legislation pushed through when America entered the war. But on 7 June 1913 the IWW was still alive and kicking, and that evening those three letters literally towered over the Madison building. At the time John Reed was already a brilliant, enterprising young man, but it has to be said that the format was not of his own invention. "Pageants" were an established tradition (perhaps not always bearing that name), that had been popular in the western world for centuries, and can be traced back to the religious representations of the Middle Ages and the rebirth of European theatre in the Renaissance. And in that particular period in the United States they were undergoing a sudden revival in connection with the new migratory flows hitting the country, bringing in a wide variety of different lifestyles and cultural traditions. Out of the "New Pageant Movement", a movement for "community" or "civic" theatre, in 1913 came the American Pageant Association, involving writers and organizers like Percy MacKaye [7]. But while the "official" pageant movement aimed to foster integration, and even the social elevation of the lowest classes (namely immigrants), in the context of smoothing out conflicts and fostering the process of "Americanization", therefore under the aegis of a conservative, moderate political indoctrination, the intentions of John Reed and the IWW were very different. The Paterson Pageant was obviously also a work of political propaganda, but in the opposite direction. Linda Nochlin [8] describes it as a clear, dramatic

statement of the fact that the "new citizens" were making a key contribution to the country, a contribution that went well beyond their dances, music and folklore; immigrants were obliged to give over their health, their hopes, their honour and that of their children – forced to live in poverty and squalor for the benefit of WASP capitalist society. Nochlin notes how Reed's show laid bare the falsity of the symbols that accompanied the "American dream" of freedom, democracy and prosperity for the oppressed immigrant workers at Paterson, and as a consequence for the entire nation.
The most interesting thing, however, was that John Reed and his collaborators managed to achieve this effect by boldly innovating existing traditions, yet without sacrificing the immediacy and engagement of popular pageants, and grafting on a series of visual and expressive elements characteristic of the avant-garde movements of the day. Some reporters even talked about Futurism, and one eye-witness reported [9] on how "Bobby Jones" had insisted on having a Gordon Craig style element in the production, with a long street scene cutting through the audience, through which the funeral procession advanced, creating an "electrifying" feeling of unity among all those present. The account talks about an unprecedented "vibration" between the workers who had come to show their counterparts what was happening on the other side of the river, and those who had come to see the show.

The reason I have dwelled on this episode at length is not only because it so consummately illustrates the roots (perhaps unwitting) of many works which fit the description of re-enactment to various extents, from the strange docu-dramas of Peter Watkins dating from the sixties to the present day, to the reconstruction of the Kennedy assassination in *The Eternal Frame* by T.R. Uthco & Ant Farm (1975), up to two very different contemporary works: the reconstruction of the miners' strike in Britain in *The Battle of Orgreave* by Jeremy Deller, 2001 (and the resulting 2002 film by Mike Figgis), and Janez Janša's ironic but heartfelt tribute to the Republic of Fiume of 1919/1920, the 2008 project *Il porto dell'amore*.

The *Pageant of the Paterson Strike* also shows how misleading it is to view "political" or "social" art as irremediably entrenched in traditional forms, "popular" in the most backward sense. And it also goes to show that the interweaving of questions of history, memory and language is not purely a current phenomenon, and is not the effect of a movement (a variegated and often equivocal movement at that) like postmodernism, instead being rooted in all art of the twentieth century.
Naturally, in 1913, the media system was in its infancy. It would be almost 20 years before the first experiments with television, and almost 40 before TV became the main means of mass communication, taking over the role played by radio from the 1940s. The rise of television was the main element of the new media landscape that formed during the 50s and that was deployed to full effect by the beginning of the 60s. This media landscape was fairly soon analyzed and described in various ways by many artists and academics. Fifty years on, the three versions that we can view as the most relevant and seminal contributions, are those of a Canadian professor of

literature, in the process of founding the discipline of media sociology (Marshall McLuhan); a French conceptual artist who founded a miniscule political group destined to enjoy considerable success in 1968 (Guy Debord), and an English novelist who viewed his own Western culture with the eyes of the East, having been born in Shanghai (James Ballard).
It was soon clear that the advent of the mass media completely upended the status of images and the role of history in Western society. Images completed their process of transmigration from art, a process which began at the end of the 19th century with the historic avant-garde movements, and made their way into the new devices for representing everyday life (television and advertising). History ceased to be the result of events processed and reconstructed by a specialized group of intellectuals (historians), who supplied society with its self-image and meaning, and instead began to be constructed on the fly, out of images which came from "real life", yet were in some way filtered from an "artistic" angle and delivered onto the screen.
Jan Verwoert sums up the situation effectively:

> History is broadcasted life. In the moment of live transmission the event is compressed into an image that shows everything but says nothing. To re-insert history into the image would therefore mean to disrupt the illusion of full presence generated by the image of actuality. [10]

It was here, in this eradication of the traditional devices of memory, in this initial possession of the collective imagination by what Debord dubbed "the society of the spectacle", that the process (deceptively) viewed as "the end of history" began. And it was here, ahead of its time, that the new story of re-enactment began.
The key event in this process was the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy on 22 November 1963 in Dealey Plaza in Dallas. It was James Ballard who grasped with extraordinary lucidity the key importance of this event, and who saw in it the crux of the new collective Western imagination, the loss of a centre and meaning for late modern man. In his 1970 novel *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which brought together the so-called "condensed novels" published previously, Ballard brings us a character who changes his name from one episode to the next (Travis, Talbot, Traven, ...) and tries to "repeat" on those around him (his wife, his doctors, the nurses), the great media events of the 1960s: the death of Marilyn Monroe, the Apollo disaster, Kennedy's assassination. "This is Traven's hell. You can see he's trying to build bridges between things – this Kennedy business, for example. He wants to kill Kennedy again, but in a way that makes sense." [11]
The narrative focuses on the Kennedy assassination above all. By rewriting the event over and over, enlarging and decontextualizing various frames and little sequences of the film of the shooting that Zapruder recorded completely by chance, Ballard was constructing, in writerly form, the very first re-enactment of the new media world. Here we find the "disequilibrium, instability and dissymmetry" that Deleuze was talking about in the same period. Repeating the Kennedy assassination, detaching it from its media splendour (and the "double alienation" described by Jennifer Allen), without rejecting the media universe *a priori,* on the contrary actually intensifying the logic of the media, bringing the consequences of media devices to an extreme: this was Ballard's intention, and he deliberately set out to take on the ambiguity and wealth of the media to

try and upend its outcomes. The only way to give meaning to events that television rendered meaningless was to throw oneself headlong into the "hidden agenda" of the events themselves. As Hölderlin indicated, where there is danger, salvation also grows.

> Kennedy's assassination presides over *The Atrocity Exhibition*, and in many ways the book is directly inspired by his death, and represents a desperate attempt to make sense of the tragedy, with its huge hidden agenda. The mass media created the Kennedy we know, and his death represented a tectonic shift in the communication landscape, sending fissures deep into the popular psyche that have not yet closed. [12]

Only five years later two collectives of American artists, Ant Farm and T.R. Uthco, produced their re-enactment of the Dallas shooting, *The Eternal Frame*, in which, "at the same time we see a live performance, a 'making of', a social experiment, and a filmic simulation" [13].
When, in 1999, Pierre Huyghe produced *The Third Memory*, which compares the restaging of the legendary bank robbery carried out in Brooklyn on 22 August 1972, with the film *Dog Day Afternoon* directed by Sidney Lumet in 1975, it became clear that memory has no "objective" role, but that, as Jennifer Allen says, "the image is no longer an illustration but has assumed the phatic role that was once proper to language alone." [14] .
We must therefore look to the devices of language to try and get a better understanding of the intentions and perspectives of contemporary re-enactment.

Re-enactment, language, power

Contemporary art, from Duchamp (and Kossuth) onwards, is much more linguistic than iconic. Obviously this observation does not solve any problems, and indeed raises many more. In what way is contemporary art a linguistic art? Because it describes the world using language, or because it tries to change the world?
And what devices of language does it favour: metaphor or metonym? And of these devices, which does it leave intact and which does it deform? Some further reflections on re-enactment can help us, if not to answer, at least to formulate these questions more effectively.

If we develop Deleuze's concept of repetition, we realize that the re-enactment of historic events differs considerably from that of artistic events (as Quaranta underlines in his essay), to the extent that we begin to doubt whether we can really view the latter as repetition. Repetition is not generality, states Deleuze: "Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities." [15] In other words, it is only possible to repeat things that are singular, that cannot be exchanged or substituted by any other term, in their status of pure event.
Now a pageant, or the re-enactment of a historic event, is a repetition in this very way: a historic event is "restaged" for the pure pleasure of reliving it, or in order to "fix it in the memory", or reiterate its meaning in the context of establishing a system of values or collective identity. But the given historic event remains singular, and only in virtue of this can it be re-enacted, or repeated, in terms of being restaged. Those watching a re-enactment of this kind run no risk of confusion,

knowing that the event has already happened and cannot therefore be replaced by another event, merely re-evoked, alluded to.
Things take a different turn when we come to re-enactments of performances or past artistic events, or even re-enactments of historic events done with artistic intentions. In this case the original artistic or historic event is not taken up as a singular event: we are not interested in its irreplaceability or uniqueness. It is never the original "meaning" that the new artist wants to restore or comment on; if anything, it is a different meaning, possibly secondary, yet compatible with that event, that the artist wishes to place new emphasis on. The new meaning might even be a critique, or at least express an ironic distance from the original performance. This applies to most of Janez Janša's re-enactments: just think of the parting shot of *C'était un rendez-vous (déja vu)*, in which the revealed identity of the (assumed) protagonist of the race through Paris is in net contrast with the breakneck speed of the video, to the point that it is almost a denial, if not a mockery, of the original performance itself. In Watkins' works the anachronisms and Brechtian violations of the conventions of film (actors looking and speaking into the camera, a television appearing in a meticulous reconstruction of daily life in the Commune of Paris) serve to convey the film maker's intentions to elicit a reflection on the meaning of those historic events for the here and now, for the present. Artistic re-enactments therefore do not view the original event as something singular and irreducible, but on the contrary, as a complex set of elements that can be interpreted in various ways. It is as if the event, work or performance that serves as the point of departure for the re-enactment, was viewed as a "field of differences", not fully deployed and therefore only potential, from which more than one meaning can be extracted.
In this way re-enactment declares its affinity with linguistic acts. Among all the human cultural devices based on differential systems capable of constructing meaning, language is undoubtedly the original and most powerful one.
All other human cultural systems are, in the final analysis, linguistic, as they are based on the ability to (selectively) double reality and construct a "world" – powers typical of language. But not all cultural systems use the same operative principle as language. Many of them take the linguistic premise for granted and work on other planes, with other tools. This is true of art in its "figurative" version, and in any case up to the point that images represented its main form of expression.
A painting or a sculpture can be interpreted as a semiotic system (if this is really possible) in a very different way from language: there is no alphabet, no system of elementary iconic signs - meaningless on their own and only acquiring meaning when combined. In conceptual art, on the other hand, linguistic devices are at the heart of the artistic operation, because the artist's intention is to highlight the gaps between different linguistic/conceptual representations of reality. In the context of conceptual art, however, re-enactment makes a more explicit use of social memory, and therefore – independently of the intentions of the individual artist – it enters into a dimension that in turn influences the memory of the spectator or participant, or at least their assumptions. This is clearly underlined by Steve Rushton:

> Rather than being a form of representation à la mode, or (within the art context) a form of Duchampian

> appropriation of time, re-enactment is closer to a frame for varied critical approaches to the manipulation and restructuring of memory. [16]

Manipulating and restructuring memory: it is evident that the device of re-enactment in itself does not guarantee a "correct" political or social usage, which depends on the intentions of the author or performer, but nevertheless the linguistic dimension of re-enactment always appears to aim to create some kind of "effect", not only on the memory but in general on the experience of the participant:

> At first appearing to be a subject in itself, re-enactment turns out to be the agent of memory and experience. The issue then becomes not what re-enactment is but what re-enactment does – what is its effect in each particular case? [17]

Anke Bagma is even more explicit:

> The notions enactment and re-enactment call attention to the performative embodiment that experience and memory entail. [18]

This is probably the key point, and it regards not only re-enactment, but performance in general. The linguistic dimension of these actions is not purely *descriptive*, but *performative*. Re-enactments or performances are basically utterances, or sets of utterances, but their aim is not to describe or reflect something, but to create something. Re-enactments and performances create situations (and therefore create the conditions to alter the behaviour of the spectators) at the very moment they utter something, and they are therefore very similar to what linguists call "performative utterances".

John L. Austin, who was the first to propose this linguistic category, concluded that in a set of utterances or in a given linguistic production it is extremely difficult to identify a specific subset of performative utterances; that there are no utterances which are purely descriptive (or "constative" as he called them), and that the performative dimension is inherent in language. This led him to introduce the category of "speech acts", which he separated into "locutionary" (simply "saying something"), "illocutionary" ("doing something" by saying something) and "perlocutionary" ("getting someone to do something" by saying something).

He concluded that in general both locutionary acts and illocutionary acts were just abstractions, and that every authentic speech act contains both of these elements.[19]

So why does re-enactment so successfully express the "illocutionary force" of the utterance or utterances it corresponds to? Possibly due to the fact that referring to a past artistic event, or referring to a historic event with artistic (and therefore linguistic) intent, weakens the referential concern, the "descriptive" function of the event, and what comes to the fore is the act performed in saying something.

This is why re-enactment prefers metonym over metaphor, and contiguity over resemblance; this is why its "illocutionary" dimension reconnects language with reality and lastly reminds us how abundant reality is compared to language.

If I can constantly create new linguistic acts in relation to something that has already happened, or has already been said, this is the case because no linguistic act can ever express the totality of an event.

Re-enactment thus expresses, better than other linguistically-oriented forms of art, the "faculty of language", the "power of language", its biological, non-specialized root: "not a landscape with detailed topography, but the no man's land that is directly experienced by infants, the speech impaired, translators." [20]

By translating complex utterances and actions from one language to another, from one context to another, from one intention to another, re-enactment reminds us how unspecialized, how "open to the world", and how explosively creative humans are, and it speaks of the inexhaustible reserve of words and actions contained in the human language faculty. Which is what, if it ever had a purpose, has to be the purpose of art.

notes

[1] Jennifer Allen, "Einmal ist keinmal", infra, pp. 23-33.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra, in Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, hg. von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, Berlin und New York 1967ff. (*KGW*, Bd. 4), Eng. transl. by Thomas Common, http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/zarapt3.htm#con

[3] Herman Diels, Walther Kranz (Hrsg. und Übers.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Weidmann, Zürich 1996, Heraklit 91.

[4] Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1968, p. 7. Eng. transl. by Paul Patton, Athlone Press, London 1997.

[5] Ibid, pp. 30-31.

[6] Domenico Quaranta, "RE:akt! Things that Happen Twice", infra, pp. 53-63.

[7] These and other observations on pageants in the USA in Linda Nochlin, "The Paterson Strike Pageant of 1913", *Ácoma*, VI, 16 (spring 1999): now in Wobbly! *L'Industrial Workers of the World e il suo tempo*, ed. Bruno Cartosio, Shake, Milan 2007, pp. 137-148.

[8] Linda Nochlin, quoted, p. 147.

[9] Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Movers and Shakers*, New York 1936, p. 204, quoted in Linda Nochlin, quoted, p.142. The "Bobby Jones" referred to here is the scenographer Robert Edmond Jones, Reed's fellow student at Harvard, who later became famous for designing the sets of the first shows produced from the writings of Eugene O'Neill.

[10] Jan Verwoert, "The Crisis of Time in Times of Crisis", infra, pp. 35-39.

[11] James G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, New Revised Edition, Re/Search Publications, San Francisco 1990, p. 36.

[12] *Ibid*, p. 34.

[13] "The Eternal Frame", in: Inke Arns, Gabriel Horn (eds), *History Will Repeat Itself. Strategies of re-enactment in contemporary (media) art and performance*, exhibition catalogue, Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2007, p.151.

[14] Jennifer Allen, "Einmal ist keinmal", infra, pp. 23-33.

[15] Gilles Deleuze, quoted, p. 7.

[16] Steve Rushton, "Tweedledum and Tweedledee resolved to have a battle", in *Experience Memory Re-enactment*, eds. Anke Bangma, Steve Rushton and Florian Wüst, Piet Zwart Institute in collaboration with Revolver, Rotterdam 2005, pp. 10-11.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Anke Bangma, "Contested Terrains", in *Experience Memory Re-enactment*, cit., p. 14 (italics added).

[19] John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1962, Lesson XI, "Assertions, Performatives and Illocutionary Force".

[20] Paolo Virno, *Quando il verbo si fa carne. Linguaggio e natura umana*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 2003, p. 161.

Jennifer Allen

"Einmal ist keinmal"

Observations on Re-enactment

JENNIFER ALLEN

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1.

Re-enactment always presupposes a missing body. Consider how the term "enactment" relates to the law (decree, edict, mandate) and to the theater (dramatization, acting, impersonation). In both cases, a unique body has been replaced by an endless series of bodies that are interchangeable with one another, across time and space. The law in a democracy cannot be personified as can the law in an absolute monarchy, which is embodied in a despot-king who signs decrees according to his inclination: "Tel est notre grand plaisir." In a democracy, law is enacted by the abstract collectivity of the nation-state and then reenacted by countless citizens who succeed or fail to perform according to its terms.
The theater performance functions in a similar way, since the script can direct anyone and everyone to brood like Hamlet, to wait for Godot or to suffer a 4.48 psychosis. A theatrical representation may be based on an individual's life, but this person is always already assumed to be gone. Behind every re-enactment, there is a "little death", be it the beheading of the king or the passing episode in the life of an individual, grand or insignificant. Although no one really dies in the re-enactment, all language becomes an epitaph.

2.

Re-enactment uses the body as a medium for reproducing the past. Every re-enactment is a form of natural history, which is centered upon the comings and goings of human beings. While a re-enactment may depend upon historical documents and artifacts – from newspaper reports describing an event to the clothing worn by key figures – the body remains the vehicle that can carry the past into the present, that can give the past presence. After all, the re-enactment is much closer to the zookeeper's living charges than the taxidermist's stilted creatures. Mediated by living bodies, the re-enactment also emerges as an egalitarian way of doing history, which is inherited by humans through the mere incidence of their birth. As everyone has a body and therefore the same means to reproduce history, there is no division, specialization or alienation of labor, which all arise with the evolution of material property. Indeed, there is no property in the re-enactment, no possession that can be held longer than the breath.

3.

The re-enactment often searches for a lost totality. Take the re-enactment of a crime, where the pieces of a puzzle are put together through a careful restaging of the misdeed. Here, the missing body inherent to every re-enactment becomes the body of the missing criminal, who leaves a script of clues. The re-enactment can also be found in psychoanalysis and its offspring (both legitimate and illegitimate), therapies that seek to cure the patient by reliving a traumatic past under qualified supervision. In this case, the missing body belongs to the patient himself, who has lived his past selectively by repressing certain experiences. As Freud and Breuer wryly remarked, hysterics suffer from reminiscences, which they are condemned to repeat as pathological symptoms in the body.

The talking cure liberates the body by revisiting the trauma, by turning partially repressed memories into completely cognizant ones. Where the hysterics deny part of their own history, the participants in a historical re-enactment – whether players or spectators – attempt to deny the passage of time itself and seek to be at one with the past, like a child in the womb: immersed in history and without history.

4.

Whenever the search for a lost totality takes place in the re-enactment, there is always a witness – specialist or spectator who turns the many parts into a total sum.
The presence of witnesses guarantees that something complete has taken place, even if the re-enactment strays in its portrayal of the original event.
What is reproduced is not only a series of past occurrences but also an experience of duration, which lends the past a clear beginning and an unmistakable ending.
In contrast to the chaotic unfolding of the original event, the re-enactment knows what will happen and, more importantly, when this happening starts and finishes. In the eyes of the witness, the original event becomes historical by taking up time, and claims its status as history by appearing as a discrete event with a finite duration.
In other words, the re-enactment makes the origin, gives the origin a definition and an identity that it may not have had for itself. The witness casts a particular gaze at the re-enactment of the origin: not looking, nor seeing, but recognizing something that has already happened, even if the event was never experienced firsthand by the witness. In recognition – which is linked to the verbs identify, admit, endorse and honor – the gaze fulfills the promise of instant knowledge while legitimizing this knowledge as recurring truth.

5.

Re-enactment depends upon a linear construction of time. Of course, the "re" denotes a return to an earlier time, the existence of an event that has expired and therefore can be safely enacted once again, without being confused with itself. In this model of time, many predicaments inherent to the re-enactment – such as splitting one's experience between the past and the present – are resolved.
While forging one straight line into the future, time leaves a set of train tracks in its wake and only sells return tickets, whatever the destination in the past.
Hegel theorized this model of time by linking Spirit's creation of world history with the sun's motion from east to west; H.G. Wells penned a fictional version of the time machine, which could travel through the unified time of world history as if traveling through space. Indeed, like Hegel and Wells, the re-enactment confounds history with geography, spatializes the past and treats its linearity and continuity as an architectural site, if not a stage that can be animated by new players. While proclaimed as universal, this model of time did not have the same consequences for everyone and put some people in the past and others in the present. Like world history, the global day humbly

begins in the orient only to culminate in the occident; the West is not a relative geographical marker but an absolute one that defines progress; the most progressive, Westerners are the most privileged travelers who can buy the most tickets to the past. Since only the West is assumed to be contemporaneous with the present, all other destinations are equated with time traveling in history. Herein lies the violence of the re-enactment: other societies appear as the backward re-enactments of the Western world's history, or they have been forced to reenact parts of this history in order to "catch up" with the present. Every sunset is not a sign of progress, yet the re-enactment asserts that the West is now's timekeeper.

6.

There is repetition, but not re-enactment, in orality. Of course, oral cultures also use the body as a medium for reproducing the past, but they do not assume the temporal split between now and then, which renders the "re" in re-enactment possible. Instead, the past and the present mingle with each other; they exist in cohabitation because there is no library, no archive, no museum, where the past could be safely stored. The body plays all these roles, juggling new events without dropping any from the past, because dropping one would mean losing it forever. In the ever-expanding archive of oral cultures, accumulation is indistinguishable from distribution. Each new event is "recorded" with an older one in the archive, which consists of portable tales, poems, songs. The wife in a union that has gone sour may slightly alter a poem to address the sad state of affairs. By singing the modified poem, she spreads "news" that everyone can "read", because they are familiar with the traditional version. While inspired by her life, the woman does not explicitly address her situation but rather transforms an unfortunate turn of events into an opportunity to revive a collective culture through repetition.
Here, repetition does not strive for an exact copy of the past. Rather, the past incorporates novelty into itself; the novelty serves to recollect the past; both are bound to each other through the creative interventions of the collectivity.
Fahrenheit 451 – François Truffaut's film based on Ray Bradbury's novel – offers a close approximation of orality for a literate culture: the characters learn novels by heart from one another, and wander around reciting the tales, because books are forbidden. Relying on the body, the re-enactment – like *Fahrenheit 451* – sits oddly between orality and literacy, poised between the book and the body, between learning by rote and living by remembering.

7.

The society of the spectacle and its many attendant visual technologies, from photography to television, complicates all re-enactments by transforming them into reproductions. Captured by the camera lens, the re-enactment becomes a reproduction of the past and a reproduction of itself; the re-enactment emerges as yet another original with its own claims to authenticity that are inextricably linked to its reproduction. Indeed, the spectacle is so omnipresent that a re-enactment must be recorded to have an authentic existence, if to exist at all. The camera is the only ticket for traveling on the time machine. Since the reproduced re-enactment can be endlessly circulated, it may seem to come even closer to

the repetitions of an oral society, albeit as a perfect copy that never strays from itself. There is no doubt that the society of the spectacle borrows mnemonic techniques from orality. Yet the spectacle uses these techniques to colonize time with a continuous now instead of perpetuating the past to prevent its irrevocable loss, as in orality. Consider how reshooting a film sequence a mere day later involves erasing any signs of the passage of that day. Time traveling on the camera is no longer about visiting the past but about organizing the present. The fact that the most historically advanced technologies for conserving events have occasioned an increase in the circulation of the past – instead of its safe storage in the archives – attests to a shift from production to reception, where active players are replaced by passive spectators in the re-enactment. The spectacle and spectatorship have become so predominant that we seem to prefer reproduced re-enactments of our own pasts, even our most immediate past. Compare the woman singing the altered poem or another woman wearing a historical costume on a stage with a woman enjoying an art exhibition through the viewfinder of a digital camera. Oral society puts a prime on experience; the re-enactment puts a prime on the past; the society of the spectacle values only reproductions.

8.

When the re-enactment is recorded to be reproduced, there is a double alienation. First, the body is no longer the main medium for making the past; the biological reproduction is replaced by a mechanical one, the eye with a lens, the presence of the actor with a glowing monitor, a silver screen or a set of gelatin prints. As the actor's presence becomes superfluous, the audience becomes the missing body that is endlessly reproduced and interchangeable, across time and space. The audience – better, the spectator – plays its part by watching Hamlet, Godot or early morning psychosis. The audience as spectator has nothing to do with the witness, who recognizes, identifies, admits, endorses and honors the past, but is a part to be played by anyone, anywhere, anytime. As the script shifts from actors to spectators, interpretation is no longer about authenticity but reception: the question is not "Is this re-enactment true to the past?" but "Is this re-enactment true to our present?" While spectators appear to wield a new power over the past – as the ultimate "actors" in the re-enactment – they are alienated. This second alienation arises since the reproduction, however ephemeral and ethereal, remains material property and, above all, private property, no matter how many times it circulates in public. A mechanical reproduction always implies a division, specialization and alienation of labor in both the production and the reception of the re-enactment. Someone somewhere owns the camera, the rights to the story, the seats in the theater, the stills from the movie. Budget, not birth, imparts the right to make history, whether hiring the actors or buying the movie ticket.

A reproduced re-enactment especially as a film – offers the illusion of ownership, a virtual experience of property which spectators can never hold in their hands, let alone act for themselves. The visibility of actors, who always play someone else, only serves to hide the owners behind the spectacle. Its genius lies in making the ephemeron into a commodity that can never be entirely possessed by the consumer but must be consumed again and again.

A film, even when purchased, cannot be owned and dispensed with like finite commodities such as cars or clothing, as it remains restricted to private use. The rise in piracy is, first, a refusal to pay what amounts to a tax on the repeated consumption of the same product and, second, a recognition that looking is indeed a type of labor.

9.

Performance art arose with the society of the spectacle. Artists initially believed that they could resist the market by working with the one artistic medium that had not yet been commodified, namely, the human body. By using their bodies, artists could communicate directly with an audience and avoid the whole question of property, whether upheld by the gallery or the museum. In retrospect, performance art – from expanded cinema to happenings seems to have anticipated an economy beyond the traditional material commodity, where spectacles, adventures, experiences and services could be packages and sold. While the performance artist was a pioneer – especially in expanding the body's possibilities – art's role was already shifting from a political avant-garde to an economic avant-garde. Art could be a harbinger of, not just lives to be realized at a moment's notice, but also lifestyles that could realize long-term profits. Andy Warhol, whose cynicism was indistinguishable from optimism, was one of the few to understand the double edge of this era – an era when wearing jeans constituted a major social statement (and tipped off the market to the endless commodities that could be sold in the name of style). Little remains of the original performances, beyond scattered props, black-and-white photographs and super-eight films, which are generally blurry or poorly lit. The dearth of artifacts and documents attest to the artists' desire to resist the market while leaving their mark in history. Indeed, performances were recorded with a sensibility that lies somewhere between journalism and the snapshot, as history and as happenstance, both singular and moving moments in time. The aesthetics of the documents ultimately served to confirm the belief that the artist's performance, like the body itself, could never be reproduced.

10.

In light of this history, the re-enactment of performances - whether Andrea Fraser's take on Martin Kippenberger's drunken tirade or Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy's spin on Vito Acconci's auto-erotic acts appear to break a taboo. While artists' aesthetic styles have long been quoted, appropriated and reworked, the artist's body has remained inviolable in what appears as an unspoken professional pact: artists are not actors, art is not theater, artworks are not plays. Reenacting a performance by another artist is not so much a reproduction as a critique of the autonomy of art and the artist in a field that includes many arts, from theater to music, which tend to thrive through interpretation. Consider the pianist who makes a reputation with a certain repertoire or the actor who gains prominence by playing a role that countless other actors have played before. The fact that Fraser and Kelley & McCarthy effect a shift in gender – from man to woman – also diminishes the male artist's claim to creativity in genius, which is assumed to be absolutely singular even if its products recall efforts by other artists. The legendary status of

Kippenberger's and Acconci's original performances in recent art history puts Fraser's and Kelley & McCarthy's re-enactments closer to orality, especially since the memory of the originals has circulated, not through artifacts, but primarily through testimony and hearsay. The audience can "read" the "news" in the new version since they have heard about the old one. By contrast, Barbara Visser and Omer Fast work in the world of spectacles where originals – performances or people – exist only by being reproduced. Thus, Visser happily invites an actress to perform her artist's talk and yet another actress to reenact this initial performance. Fast, instead of looking at the original story behind Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*, travels to the movie's location in Poland and discovers extras whose memories of the Nazi past are mixed with memories of making the film.
By treating the reproduced re-enactment as a constitutive part of reality, Visser and Fast articulate the new program: not "everyone is an artist" but everyone is an actor.

11.

Beyond these individual acts, there has been an increase in re-enactments of performance art. In 2001 at Berlin's KunstWerke, *A Little Bit of History Repeated* brought together a group of contemporary artists who reinterpreted performances originally done in the sixties and seventies, from Laura Lima's remake of Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, 1964, to Tino Sehgal's take on John Baldessari's I Am Making Art, 1971. In September 2003 at Paris's Ranelagh theater,Yoko Ono reenacted her own Cut Piece as an expression of her hope for world peace. In November 2003, London's Whitechapel Art Gallery hosted the second part of *A Short History of Performance*, which offered re-enactments of original performances by the original artists, including Carolee Schneeman and Hermann Nitsch. By showing several works together, the exhibition objectified performance as history while confirming the transformation of performance, if not the human body, into a reproducible commodity. Both have lost their singularity to the spectacle – and, perhaps, to genetics. One could argue that the original performances of the sixties and seventies needed to be reenacted in order to catch up with the spectacle, in order to be reproduced, in order to exist. Ono's intervention seems to differ since she decided to reenact *Cut Piece*, not for an exhibition, but for the mass media, and not merely to ensure the continued existence of her work, but in order to make a difference in the present. In France, the organizers placed a full page newspaper advert for the event with a statement by Ono who described her intervention as a response to the political changes in the wake of 9/11. Her statement appeared around the world for a little bit longer than fifteen minutes. It seems that Ono hoped that her performance would reenact the peace movement of the sixties on a global scale. In this case, the re-enactment searched for a lost totality, not in the performance, but in an entire generation.

Postscript

The human body cannot be one with reproductions of the body. Whether mechanical or digital, the reproduction not only alienates the body but also threatens to usurp its subjectivity. In other words, pictures have become much like people, even if the pictures are not portraits of people.

The title of Camiel van Winkel's book *The Regime of Visibility* (2005) underscores the significance of reproductions, from photographs to films, from flashes on news websites to the digital images that appear on mobile telephone screens, from Facebook to YouTube. Of course, the leader of the regime of visibility is none other than the image itself.

Legal cases around images are less about censoring their content than about expanding or restricting their distribution and circulation. Through these cases, each image comes to have its own jurisdiction. Establishing this jurisdiction implicitly gives the image a right of passage, if not a virtual territory defined by visibility.

The legal dispute about the Frenchness of *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (2004) demonstrates that even a feature film can have a nationality. Although the film was shot in France with French actors performing a French story, it could not be legally considered as French, due to its financing (partly American) and the first place it was seen (the USA).

A regime of visibility seems to be a logical extension, if not a more powerful development, of Guy Debord's society of the spectacle. Spectacles came to mediate all social relations and now have become a prerequisite for their very existence. Like the king whose portrait circulated on coins, each person needs reproductions to have a currency: not only social but also a professional, intimate, economic, historical.

The image is no longer an illustration but has assumed the phatic role that was once proper to language alone. Phrases like "Hello" do not convey information but perform a social task of binding people. Thanks to social bookmarking tags - from Facebook to Digg – images have come to circulate, not for their content, but as greetings.

Since reproductions are a prerequisite for relations – not just social ones – it may no longer be appropriate to speak of the human body being alienated through images. A rivalry between the real person and the fake reproduction seems equally irrelevant as alienation. Dependence may be the proper term, with an emerging hierarchy. Images do not need us, but we need them to exist.

We are no longer witnesses to re-enactments of the past. In realm of reproductions, we are actors who both play the role of spectator and who perform ourselves. The past is significant only insofar as it provides material to create a sense of the present, if not a sense of the human presence itself. Seeing is more credible than breathing.

As a leader, the image has a bellicose side. Where kings and presidents wage wars between nations based on territorial claims, the image instigates wars based on practices of seeing and interdictions on images. These have been regulated by religion and shaped by culture. The image's power – it does not need translation – can manifest as a violent annexation of viewers with different rules for visibility.

The way that orality became mute in the rise of literacy, so too does literate culture become immobilized by the rise of spectacles. The impact of the images of torture at the Abu Ghraib prison is a case in point. Wars are fought with weapons but they are won and lost with pictures. It is not

about propaganda. Rather, any fact needs a picture to be true. Reports of abuse at Abu Ghraib were ignored until an image of the abuse emerged.

The late novelist W.G. Sebald anticipated the primacy of images in blogs. Although Sebald was a technophobe – he did not even own a computer – his method of using photographic reproductions to construct his narratives can be found in countless blogs, which are driven equally by text and by image. The reproduction – B/W photographs, taken by Sebald or found in flea markets - is not an illustration but rather a protagonist.

Cinema gave the spectacle an unprecedented autonomy. Once projected on a screen, the image could reach just as many people, if not more, than the human voice. Moreover, much narrative work in film is accomplished by the image alone.
The murderer brandishing a gun does not need to say "I'm shooting my victim."
The regime of visibility began in the dark and took a short century to establish its rule.

In many publications – from magazines to catalogues – reproductions of artworks still serve as illustration. The image is subordinated to the text, both the caption and the essay. Even while addressing the art of film, most publications treat the image as if cinema had never occurred, as if the image could not tell its own tale. The textual descriptions of the artworks make the reproductions redundant, or vice versa.

While watching over images, art historians and critics have somehow missed their spectacular ascent. Whatever our viewing pleasures – artworks or YouTube or both – we have all participated in putting the image at the head of the regime of visibility. Indeed, we cast our votes simply by insisting on looking.

One former version of this paper (without the present "Postscript") was published in Sven Lütticken (ed.), *Life, Once More - Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, De With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, pp. 179-213.

Jan Verwoert

The Crisis of Time in Times of Crisis

On the Contemporary Conditions of the Emergence of History

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Today, history is in crisis. This does not mean that history has come to its end as some have said. On the contrary, history is unfolding again with full force. Everywhere people experience social upheavals of historic proportions. After the gambit of the Cold War ended, it is not, however, only the states of the former Soviet Union that are undergoing radical transformations of their social structure. The countries of the former West are also being shaken to the core by the current dismantling of the welfare state. But why speak of a crisis of history when in effect we are all experiencing historical change? The crisis of history emanates precisely from the fact that the current experience of history can no longer be convincingly interpreted as history. All the grand paradigms we had at our disposal to tell history as a coherent narrative have been discredited and hence rendered useless.

As Jean-François Lyotard pointed out, we no longer trust the grand narratives of modernity that describe history as the steady progress – social, cultural and technological – of mankind towards a higher civilization [1]. The credibility of these paradigms was irreversibly shattered by the cruel fact that the totalitarian regimes of modernity – Fascism, Stalinism and colonialist imperialism – justified and enforced their unjustifiable politics with recourse to these very narratives of historical progress. Lyotard portrayed the dismissal of the grand narratives as a liberating step into a post-modern, post-historical and post-ideological age. What he failed to see, and what by now has become brutally clear, is that the effacement of the grand historical narratives coincides with the new emergence of history. It is the historical events of denazification, decolonialization and, finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union that brought about the demise of the grand narratives. The forces of history obliterate the paradigms of historical interpretation. So the crisis we witness today is a painfully paradoxical situation: the experience of the emergence of history is at the same time the experience of the impossibility to tell history.

On a phenomenological level the experience of history in crisis is also the experience of a crisis of time. This is because in the time of crisis two different and essentially contradictory dimensions of temporality coincide: the time of empty duration and the time of absolute urgency. On the one hand the present is experienced as a continuum without end or direction. Without a paradigm of historical interpretation the events of the present cannot be put into any perspective. They just keep on happening. Godot never comes. In the meantime, every event, gesture or statement staged in the political arena must seem like an act of neurotic spontaneity. On the other hand, in a time that is always 'now' there is no distance in relation to anything that happens. In times of crisis, events of historical importance always seem to be impending and thus decisions always seem pressing. "Are you with (the) US or against (the) US?" the president asks, demanding an answer right away. "There is no room for manoeuvre", the chief executive says, and confronts the workers with the choice of working more for less or having their jobs outsourced to a low-wage country. In times of urgency you have no choice but to choose from the options that those in power present to you. But if the effacement of history produces a lack of true perspectives and true choice, then this also means that a sense of history is intrinsically linked to a sense of freedom: the freedom to read the past, envision a different future and thus make other choices

than those that the powers of the present force upon you.
But who shall the subject of that new history be? Us? The people? The proletariat? The nation? The democratic community of free individuals? Who is Us? History has always been thought of as a collective experience producing a collective memory.
It is therefore no accident that the effacement of the modern paradigms of historical interpretation coincides with the death of faith in the collective (at least in the highly individualized postmodern consumer societies) and the collapse of the nation state as the modern political manifestation of the collective of the people. The crisis of history is coextensive with the crisis of collectivity. The cruel outcome of this crisis is the fact that war today has become the last big project of modernity that promises to serve as a source of collectivity and history. With no other history to tell, war has become the big epic told by the media. 'War on Terror' is one blockbuster among many that portrays people embarking on the collective project of war: *Troy, Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, The Matrix, etc.* These epics complement each other. I remember a news-stand with three magazines running photos of the torture committed in American prison camps on their cover next to a fourth magazine featuring *Troy*. The images of individual bodies in pain that should have disrupted any grand narrative were outbalanced and neutralized by the aura of the epic. Once upon a time Brad Pitt saved the day.
If today the powers of the historical imagination are wielded by the military (and media) industrial complex, then how could they be put to a different use? What would it mean to formulate an alternative to the standards of historical truth-telling set by the mainstream media? What are these standards? In contemporary visual culture, to give evidence means to show facts. The norm is established by the naked realism of the video image. The consumer technology of digital video has helped equip the average citizen with a recording device, so if something happens someone will be there to take the picture. History is broadcasted life. In the moment of live transmission the event is compressed into an image that shows everything but says nothing. To re-insert history into the image would therefore mean to disrupt the illusion of full presence generated by the image of actuality. This would require going against the logic of the event and inscribing the invisible traces of the time before and after into the image.
This gesture is political. If, as Friedrich Nietzsche says, history is written by those who emerged victorious from its struggles, historical accounts based on events simply encode their triumphs as protocol. Then the untold stories of the victims of history are hidden in the shadows of the event and can only be revealed by an approach that sees beyond it. However, to doubt that history can be adequately represented in the event also means to question whether the fact is the only legitimate measure of historical truth. It might well be that the only way to do justice to those who were deprived of their future by the actual course of history is to show history not like it was, but like it could have been (for them). In this sense, Jacques Derrida speaks of "a justice which, beyond right or law, rises up in the very respect owed to whoever is not, no longer or not yet, living, presently living." [2] So to do justice to history could both mean to research actual and to imagine potential historical realites – to be painfully accurate in relation to the specificity of

historical detail and playfully speculative when it comes to re-inventing the future of histories that had none. For Walter Benjamin, the politics of commemoration and the process of mourning are linked to the urge to release history from its confinement to the past [3]. This release is a moment of freedom and joy (for those who live, have lived and will have lived). It seems essential to confront the current crisis of history with this need for the joy and freedom of historical reflection, maybe simply to recognize the crisis as our historical situation and rediscover the potentials of the historical consciousness to open up a different future.

This essay is inspired by the searching analysis of historical crisis in the films of Deimantas Narkevicius as well as by the free, speculative spirit of the work of painter and performance artist Paulina Olowska, and is thus an attempt to respond to them. First published in the *Stedelijk Museum Bulletin*, 05/04, S. 34 - 36, this text appeared also in the book: Anke Bagma, Steve Rushton, Florian Wüst (eds), *Experience Memory Re-enactment*, Piet Zwart Institute 2005, pp. 37-40.

notes

[1] Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne.* Editions de Minuit, Paris 1979.

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx. Routledge*, New York / London 1994, p. 97.

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Rod Dickinson

Fair Companions... Adventure is Dead

ROD DICKINSON

Dickinson is a artist and lecturer in Media, Culture and Practice at University of West England in Bristol, his artworks have explored the way in which our behaviour interacts with media feedback systems and social contexts. Using detailed research into moments of the past and present, he has made a series of meticulously re-enacted events and performances that explore the link between these mechanisms and our behaviour.

In 2002 he restaged Stanley Milgram's infamous 'Obedience to Authority' experiment. He has collaborated with writers Tom McCarthy (author of '*C*' and "*Remainder*') and Steve Rushton (Piet Zwart Institute) and media theorist Richard Barbrook (Westminster University).

Recent exhibitions/ performances include: Hayward Gallery, London, 2012; DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague, 2011; The Museum of Yugoslav History, 52nd Oktober Salon in Belgrade, 2011; The Showroom, London, 2011.

Performance / Re-enactment: "The Experiment"

In 1917 American feature film director D.W. Griffith was commissioned by the British government to make a fiction feature film, *Hearts of the World*, that they hoped would help propel America into the First World War. Griffith, his crew and American actresses Lillian and Dorothy Gish filmed scenes at the front where on one occasion they witnessed the full horror of the war. *The New York Times* (October 16, 1917) reported that "On one occasion near Ypres a shell burst close beside one of our big cameras and knocked it to pieces. Another shell which fell a little distance away killed eleven men who were mending a hole in the road" [1].

Initially this footage was intended to be used in the film, but little of it remains in the final version. Griffith, apparently dismayed at No Man's Land ("an aching desolation of nothingness") and for the lack of cinematic opportunity ("Everyone is hidden away in ditches... There is nothing but filth and dirt and the most soul sickening smells") [2], resolved to reconstruct most of the battle scenes back in the US. However direct reportage remains briefly in the film through the use of archive film of Lloyd George (British Prime Minster) and the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey. Griffith's strategy of travelling to the front (even if very little footage was actually used in the film) heavily inflected the way it was interpreted, to the extent that *The New York Times* called it "Not just a series of photographs of fighting". Despite now being thought of as a rather sentimental piece of Anglo-American propaganda, the review clearly links the film to the "big reality" of war [3].

In so many ways the choice that Griffith made when he (cinematically) turned away from the battlefield, choosing to restage the battle scenes in a way that corresponded more closely with his cinematic expectations of them, and presumably his commissioners' expectations of his film, exemplify the long and troubled history of the moving image and cinematic reconstruction, staging and restaging. Even in the Lumière Brothers' 1895 film, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, arguably the earliest, most nascent form of documentary, Jill Godmillow has highlighted how it was clearly staged. Apart from there being three almost identical versions of the film, she argues that,

> "You can see clearly that Lumière had his workers collect just inside the factory gates and wait there until he got his camera rolling. It's also pretty clear that he had instructed the workers not to acknowledge the camera, to just keep walking past it as if it wasn't there. But when we see that 'historical' shot today (and I'm sure when people looked at the shot in 1895), we read 'actuality.' We don't see the mediation." [4]

Nevertheless documentary has often used these strategies to persuade the audience of a film's truth, "The promise to gratify a desire to know" [5], to fix the world, a place, people, and event, in time - freezing images for later use by subsequent viewers.
But once it has become visible, and the illusion revealed, the restaging and artifice that so often characterises much documentary practice make it almost the twin of the experiments of direct cinema in the 1960s, where the same goal, to represent the world as viscerally as possible, was pursued in the opposite direction: towards the quest of an unmediated vision of the documentary subject.

The impossibility of this approach [6] and the way it was inevitably snared within the parameters of filmic construction hasn't stopped the seductive possibility of unmediated access to the world spawning a collection of filmmaking methods that have been embraced by different documentary genres. Home movies, video diaries and even CCTV footage all jostle for position trying to establish a closer, more authentic link with the world outside the camera lens. We are now used to the specific conventions that they employ to give signs of authenticity. During the 1990s the intimate, whispered confessional of the video diary became a common cinematic language. Almost a shorthand for cinema that attempted to reproduce unmediated, lived experience.

Yet both these methodologies – the high artifice of Griffith's film and the apparent immediacy of video diaries – are necessarily structured around rigid parameters. The CCTV system is the most extreme: recording only what is within the frame of its preset position or automated range of movement. The lack of sound and often black and white image further decontextualises the footage it creates. Like the CCTV image, the diary format conforms to a set of strict parameters that seem almost anti-cinematic: no crew, no lighting, no edits, endless close ups, cheap digital DV equipment and in-camera diagetic sound... But all these methodologies depend on their respective closed social and technical systems to create a recognisable image of the world.

At the centre of these closed systems is the human subject, effectively a performer; while the trained presentation of an actor is usually something that is professionalized, the role play that many of the forms described above depend upon is familiar to us all. Slavoj Zizek has proposed that the most unsettling aspect of reality TV is the way that it has made us aware that in our own lives we already play roles. Inverting Michel Foucault's analysis of the panopticon where we are (potentially) always observed and moderate our behaviour accordingly to conform to inner and external influences; from institutional contexts to our emotional relationships. Zizek proposes that our anxiety and fascination with this type of television originates from the prospect of not being exposed to the other's gaze all the time, "so that the subject needs the camera's gaze as a kind of ontological guarantee of his/her being." [7]
Certainly in the wake of Debord's analysis of the spectacular society and the development of post Fordist economies the link between image and performance in late capitalism is now embedded in everyday experience: workers in a service economy understand perfectly that their economic success is tied to their public performance, and that performativity is (as Debord argues) extended into our leisure time [8]. More recently it is further regulated by the use of online activity, where web forums and social networking web sites subject our identities to the tabulated regime of the relational database. The individual repeats or inhabits a set of prescribed templates or behaviours. It matters little whether the subject is performing for work colleagues, daytime television viewers or viewers of a web cam.

In 1971, a few years after Debord published *The Society of the Spectacle*, Philip Zimbardo, a psychology professor at Stanford University, created a psychology experiment in which the way that individuals repeat and inhabit expected performative behaviour was shockingly

demonstrated. The Stanford prison experiment placed a group of male students in a simulated prison (a makeshift set in the basement of the University). The eighteen participating students were randomly assigned a role as either a guard or prisoner. Zimbardo gave each group the respective clothing for their roles: the guards were given khaki uniforms and mirrored sunglasses, while the prisoners were given dress-like smocks and assigned numbers instead of their names. Zimbardo created a set of basic rules for the prison, but the key to the experiment was for the guards to find their own way of running the prison and maintaining order and control.
Within a few days both groups had become entirely absorbed in their respective roles within the simulated prison. Zimbardo later contended that they (and he, as the 'prison warden') had 'internalized' these roles [9].
Over the course of the first six days the guards initiated and escalated an increasingly harsh regime within the simulation, forcing prisoners to do menial and repetitive work for hours on end. Prisoners were forced to clean out toilet bowls with their bare hands, or do push-ups, and subjected to solitary confinement and a host of other humiliating 'punishments'. This culminated in Zimbardo notoriously terminating the experiment prematurely. Perhaps one of the most extraordinary aspects of the experiment was the way in which people external to the situation also conformed to its regime and adopted prescribed roles: Zimbardo recounts that when parents arrived for 'visiting hour' they complied with a range of arbitrary rules, such as having to discuss their son's 'case' and being made to wait for half an hour. Moreover they sought to negotiate from within the system that Zimbardo had created, appealing privately to make conditions better for their son [10].

In Zimbardo's analysis it is the situation that controls and determines the behaviour of the individual, often overriding any sense of ethical or moral resistance. The factors that influence the behaviour of individuals include – among many things – architecture, social hierarchy and uniforms (Zimbardo even cites studies that show how aggressive behaviour in children is accentuated when they don Halloween costumes). He contends that the individual is born with "templates" to fulfil any number of creative or destructive acts [11]. The secretly shot film of the experiment *Quiet Rage* shows the process by which the subjects adopted their roles and developed their abusive behaviour. Significantly, the subjects did not know they were being filmed.

In 2002 the BBC and two social scientists, Alex Haslam and Stephen Reicher, recreated the experiment for British television, in a programme entitled *The Experiment*. The set they used was similar to Zimbardo's (if rather more sophisticated), and they followed many of the same procedures that he implemented for his 1971 experiment. The one fundamental difference in their recreation was that all the participants knew they would be filmed. At various points in the experiment the subjects who were designated as 'prisoners' can be seen either addressing the camera or talking about how their actions would be viewed. Reicher and Haslam's experiment proceeded rather differently to its 1971 counterpart. It was noticeable how the guards were reluctant to use their power and authority to subjugate the prisoners – and how the prisoners were skilful at negotiating with the guards, rather than performing the role of the disenfranchised

prisoner. While Zimbardo terminated his experiment prematurely because of the escalating abuse, Reicher and Haslam's experiment was characterised by almost constant negotiation between prisoners and guards. Any conflicts between the guards and prisoners were quickly resolved and any hierarchical differentiations between the two groups dissipated. Near the end of *The Experiment* one of the subjects, a prisoner, apparently bored with the smooth resolution of conflicts and the resulting democratic process, turns to the semi-hidden camera to rhetorically address the experimenters, "We're having a military takeover of the regime that's been put in place yesterday... We want full military uniforms... And we're going to run this prison the way it should have been run from Day One." [12] Although he is not smiling his body language betrays the self-consciousness of his performance.

Although Reicher and Haslam admit that their subjects must have been influenced by the knowledge that they were being filmed they are unclear as to what degree it might have altered their behaviour. They claim that the presence of the cameras cannot explain all the behaviour they witnessed. Nevertheless, when viewing *The Experiment* it appears that the subjects did not seem to inhabit their roles in the same way as Zimbardo's guards and prisoners. In *The Experiment* the subjects appeared much more self conscious of their own role-play for the duration of the experiment.

Arguably the subjects of the BBC's 2002 experiment were more involved in a feedback system of performing and being aware that their performance was being monitored and judged (both by the experimenters and a television audience), and that their status in the experiment would eventually be linked to their on-screen performance. Years of exposure to reality television programmes would have also taught them an awareness of their own performance. It is also possible that some of the subjects may have known about the 1971 experiment, and its controversial outcome.

Zimbardo's film *Quiet Rage* contrasts hugely with the BBC's *The Experiment*. The explicit scenes of abuse just did not occur in the BBC's production. If the subjects performed the roles that were determined by their simulated prison environment and uniforms in *Quiet Rage* then in *The Experiment* they played roles that they knew would be expected of contestants in a reality television programme. Like the workers leaving the factory in the Lumière Brothers' early film it appears that Reicher and Haslam's subjects performed in response to the presence of a camera, but that rather than being directed by the filmmaker the subjects' actions were based on their knowledge and expectations of the media system that they knew their image would circulate in.

Foregrounding this sort of self-performative feedback emerges as a consequence of staging a recreation, where the original experiment serves as both a comparator and benchmark, and possibly as a stimulus to repeat, or not, its outcome.

Documentary / Re-enactment: "The Eternal Frame"

Documentary stagings and restagings share many of the methodologies that live re-enactments often use. Police re-enactments of crime scenes choreograph people, usually victims or perpetrators, moving through space in order to convey information about a previous event to the viewer (frequently their purpose is to be filmed). Like much documentary practice their thrust is towards a past event, and the promise of revealing something not known about a person, or a situation; even ultimately solving the crime, as Errol Morris claimed for his early documentary based on witness accounts and re-enactments of the murder of a policeman in *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). In Werner Herzog's *Little Dieter Wants to Fly* (1997), Dieter Dengler, a US Navy pilot, retraces his escape from the Vietcong through the jungle after being shot down on a bombing raid. In the course of the film he escapes on foot from Vietnam to Cambodia. We learn about Dengler's personality and extraordinary exploits as the re-enactment of his ordeal unfolds along narrow, claustrophobic jungle paths.

The epic scale documentary dramas of Peter Watkins, such as *The War Game* (1965) and *La Commune* (2000) are echoed in the logistics and scale of many battle re-enactments staged by historical re-enactment groups. In both the attention to detail is pursued with an equivalent forensic fervour. Like the day-long re-enacted battles that are common every summer weekend in England, Watkins' *La Commune* lasts nearly six hours. Although not in real time, like the battle re-enactments, temporality and audience endurance play an equally important role.

But the connection between documentary and re-enactment is not just via methodology. Re-enactments are usually used as tools to access (or construct) a version of the past, and much documentary is tied to historical memory; the strategies that it uses to convey and reconstruct historical narrative aim to persuade an audience of a film's veracity. As Griffith discovered in his feature film *Hearts of the World*, even the most tenuous connection with a factual, reported event is enough to propel an audience and critics to interpret it as near literal reportage, often with the consequence of making the obvious staging invisible to the audience.

Yet both documentary and live re-enactment exist in the historical present and are reliant on familiar methods and techniques of presentation and mediation: the documentary is dependent on filmic construction to achieve its truth-telling power, whilst the live re-enactment utilises quasi scientific procedure (crime scene re-enactments) and folk traditions often derived from pageants (battle re-enactments). For the re-enactor and the documentary maker history is literally the living trajectory of social events as they occur [13]. This 'presentist' view of history, constructed so viscerally from the material of the here and now, is very close to R. G. Collingwood's analysis of historical construction in *The Idea of History* [14], in which he controversially proposes that the proper method of the historian is to re-enact the event in his mind, and that, "The re-enactment of the past in the present is the past itself so far as that is knowable to the historian". The historian does not just mediate the past; he or she constructs it through a kind of internal lived experience.

This experience, as well as originating in the present, is subject to, or inevitably constructed from, specific 'perspectives': points of view that are embedded in the historian's own personal experience and then relayed to us via words or images.

This triangular link between documentary, history and mediation is powerfully articulated by US art collective Ant Farm in their video / performance work *The Eternal Frame*, a complex critique of representation, television, audiences, history, and simulation.

Ant Farm were a loose collective of artists, designers and political activists founded by Chip Lord and Doug Michels. The collective emerged in the 1970s in direct opposition to mainstream television and mass mediated culture, but embraced the accessibility that the new technology of video promised [15].

The Eternal Frame, made in collaboration with T. R. Uthco, is a twenty minute video piece that is a simulation of the Zapruder film of John Kennedy's assassination in Dallas. As has been well documented, the Zapruder film was shot by a bystander who was close to the motorcade when the assassination happened. The footage is generally thought to be the clearest representation of the event. Ant farm restaged the assassination in Dealey Plaza, the site of the original shooting. Early on in the video the artist Doug Hall appears dressed as JFK, complete with facial prosthetic, making his features reminiscent of JFK's. In a mock presidential office he declares: "I am in reality nothing more than another image on the television set... I am in reality nothing more than another face on your screen, I am in reality only another link in that chain of pictures which makes up the sum total of information accessible to us all as Americans... Like my predecessors, the content of the image is no different from the image itself." [16]
In this brilliant move that owes much to Marshall McLuhan's commonly repeated dictum that "the medium is the message" [17], *The Eternal Frame* situates JFK's death as a real death and as an image death, critiquing the powerful hold that the images as history have on our memory and creating a circular moment of images as history and history as images that, almost by a sleight of hand, undoes Collingwood's notion of history and untethers the documentary's simple edict toward truth-telling: what if the historical truth of an event is an image?
After rehearsing the assassination in a studio with artists/actors in a Cadillac identical to Kennedy's against a rear screen projection of the location, the car was driven through Dealey Plaza among unsuspecting onlookers and tourists. As the car reached the exact location where the shots would have been fired, all the occupants of the car acted out their respective historical roles. Jackie was played by artist Doug Michels, and JFK by Doug Hall. They performed the recoil as the imaginary bullets hit, and then Doug Hall slumped into the seat.

The re-enactment of the assassination was played out and filmed repeatedly in the plaza. The original assassination was experienced by most people via the Zapruder footage, and *The Eternal Frame* links up to that historical moment when a whole generation compulsively remembered, and minutely described, exactly where they were in relation to an image, a representation.

But Ant Farm's video as a form of re-enactment extends beyond the still or moving image. Like Debord's notion of the spectacle, Ant Farm's re-enactment literally invaded real space, inserting the historical image of the assassination back into Dealey Plaza. This process concluded with unsuspecting tourists and passers-by reacting to the staged assassination with shock and, in one instance, even tears. The behaviour of Ant Farm's impromptu audience mirrored that of the audience of the original motorcade, who were also unsuspecting, accidental witnesses. As Ant Farm's audience unconsciously performed the roles of their earlier counterparts it is almost as if, taking a Debordian turn, the re-enactment operates as the uncanny of the spectacle. A live image, in real space and real time, but simultaneously displaced.

At the end of Debord's film *Critique de la séparation* (1961), he laments what he perceives as the endless conformity of society to a set of limited possibilities,
"Fair companions" he complains, "adventure is dead". But his fatalistic statement overlooks the power of iteration and repetition within that set of closed possibilities, and their potential to signify a shift from one discursive framework to another. It is just this kind of shift that re-enactments have the potential to perform. While representing a prior event and yet clearly not located in the past, or properly in the present, re-enactments have the potential to make visible the processes and artifice that constitute them and the event that they are representing. As iterations they are necessarily a partial account of the event that they represent and as such they have the potential to break open the finality of the historical moment and its associated objectivity.

notes

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filmography

Hearts of the World (1918). Film, directed by D.W. Griffith.
La Commune (2000). Film, directed by Peter Watkins.
Little Dieter Needs to Fly (1997). Film, directed by Werner Herzog.
The Thin Blue Line (1988). Film, directed by Errol Morris.

The Eternal Frame (1975). Video, directed by Ant Farm.
Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory (1895). Film, directed by Louis Lumière.

Domenico Quaranta

RE:akt! Things that Happen Twice

DOMENICO QUARANTA

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During recent years the term reenactment and the practices it refers to have enjoyed increasing success in the artistic context. On one hand this success is due to the advent, and success, of a new generation of performance artists interested in staging seminal performances of the past, while on the other hand a series of events, shows and conferences have had a hand in drawing attention to the practice. A list, albeit provisional, could include *A Little Bit of History Repeated* (Berlin, KunstWerke 2001), in which contemporary artists staged performances of the sixties and seventies; *A Short History of Performance* (London, Whitechapel Art Gallery 2003), where the original artists re-staged their own performances; *Experience, Memory, Reenactment* (Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam 2004), a series of lectures and screenings involving, among others, Rod Dickinson, Steve Rushton and Pierre Huyghe; *Life, Once More - Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art* (Witte de With, Rotterdam 2005), featuring a number of pieces which have become part of the canons of historic reenactment, from *The Milgram Reenactment* by Rod Dickinson to *Spielberg's List* by Omer Fast; *7 Easy Pieces* (Guggenheim Museum, New York 2005), an outstanding personal exhibition by Marina Abramović, during which the artist re-staged seven performances of her own and others, attempting at the same time to offer a model for re-staging performances of the past; and the recent *History Will Repeat Itself. Strategies of reenactment in contemporary (media) art and performance* (HMKV at Phoenix Halle, Dortmund 2007), which provided a relatively exhaustive overview of reenactment inspired by past events, both historical and topical.

Despite the rather summary mention we have room for here, the aforementioned events reveal some of the key aspects of the reenactment phenomenon, and call for a reflection on its complexity. On one hand, indeed, the success of reenactment appears to be connected to a parallel, vigorous return to performance art, both as a genre practised by the new generations, and as an artistic practice with its own historicization. On the other hand the term reenactment accompanies two phenomena that at least at first glance have very little in common: restaging artistic performances of the past, and revisiting, in performance form, "real" events – be they linked to history or current affairs, past or present. Both of these aspects deserve attention, not least for the fact that they reveal the complexity of the phenomenon, and the motivations and operative approaches that are gathered under the umbrella term of reenactment.

The return of performance art

The advent of reenactment in the artistic context appears to lie at the point where two parallel, only seemingly conflictual processes converge: the predominance of 'mediatized' (or mediated) experience over direct experience, and the resurfacing of performance art.
The mass media (newspapers, radio and television) has long been our main interface with current affairs, but only in recent years, with the second Gulf War and 9-11, has it become the principal "destiny" of historic events, the witness for whom history is played out and experienced. But it is not just history – events which in one way or another belong to the upper register of our collective existence – that mainly occurs by means of the media: our daily lives are now

increasingly "mediated". Digital cameras and videocameras painstakingly document our daily existences, filling our computers and the internet with an unprecedented quantity of amateur media material. E-mail, mobile phones, chat rooms, social networks and virtual worlds are the means that we delegate a growing portion of our social relations to, and in the 3D arenas of videogames some of us experience what we reckon is the best version of our lives.

In spite of this, performance art, which became established in the late sixties and throughout the seventies, then was cast aside in the eighties when the market recovered and more traditional genres re-emerged, before being feebly relaunched in the nineties, now appears to be experiencing a second life. And this is a highly apt turn of phrase, when we consider the numerous reinterpretations of historic performances, that in the microeconomy of contemporary art appear to have acquired the clout of musical cover versions. A second life it is, but not a second youth. The performance art of today seems much more mature, conciliating and reasonable, and less pure and radical compared to its first season. Back then, documenting performances in photos and videos, when not expressly forbidden, was done in a lowly, 'for the record' way, and these documents were openly anti-aesthetic. Now, on the other hand, performance art does not exist without media-based documentation; so much so that Tino Sehgal's request not to publish images of his performances looks more like a celebrity whim than a groundbreaking stance.
Performance art came into being as an anti-establishment practice, a radical rejection of the commercialization of art – I use my body because it is the only thing that no-one can ever sell – and then gradually changed, with props becoming fetish objects, and its documentation (now carried out by professional photographers and cameramen) becoming a series of works in their own right. In this way performance art has ended up being the protégé of a spectacular system that demands experiences rather than products, events rather than objects. Or as Jennifer Allen writes:

> "In retrospect, performance art – from expanded cinema to happenings - seems to have anticipated an economy beyond the traditional material commodity, where spectacles, adventures, experiences and services could be packaged and sold."

So it was that performance art came to an agreement with the media, which on one hand guarantees its survival over time, and reconciles it to the market, and on the other offers it new scope for action, from live broadcasts to the use of virtual platforms for performance purposes. Which means that performance art no longer necessarily involves the body, and that increasingly, the rapport with the media is no longer one of subordination, but on equal terms: the media no longer simply "documents" events, but participates in them and becomes a part of them.

All of this is central to the question of reenactment, which is linked to the issue of mediation for various reasons: firstly because reconstructing the past often relies on media documentation, rather than direct knowledge, if not narrative or fictional accounts [1]; secondly because the very raison d'être of reenactment is often its photographic or video documentation [2]; and lastly because reenactment occasionally comes into being in an entirely mediatized form [3].

Performance, remediation, citation

It is not easy to identify the route by which reenactment entered the history of performance art. One thing for sure is that the concept is a vague one, linked as it is to two practices which are fundamentally different in terms of origins and motivations: restaging performances and reproducing historic events.

The first form lies entirely within the realm of art, and the particular history of performance. In the sixties and seventies, when performance art came into being as a contemporary art practice, the main aim of the artists was to distinguish what they were doing from theatre. Vito Acconci has said: "We hated the word 'performance' [...] performance had a place, and that place by definition was theatre, a place you went to like a museum." [4] The theatre was rejected as an institution, and also as the canonical arena for representation, in terms of theatrical make-believe, for being non-authentic. Performance art, on the other hand, was about authenticity, the here and now, endurance.

"No rehearsal, no repetition, no predicted end", to quote the conditions of Marina Abramović [5]. Who, it has to be said, refused to keep or display props, and refused to attribute work of art, fetish-like status to the documentation of her performances, which she did however keep. Many other artists also did so, both then and now.

The repetition of performances was another widespread practice, and in Fluxus events was even part of the DNA, based as they were on an instruction, a repeatable script. But the fact that a rule is disregarded does not prevent it from conditioning the context that generated it. It is only when this rule is cancelled from the canons of performance that repetition becomes reenactment.

In Abramović's career this happened when, after splitting up with Ulay, the artist felt the need to take her distance from her life and works, and she discovered that the best way of doing this was to "restage it" in the language of the theatre, which she had avoided like the plague till that moment. The result was *Biography* (from 2002), a "show" in which Abramović constructs her biography out of some of her historic performances interpreted according to the language and conventions of the theatre. She later gradually abandoned acting in the show herself, getting her pupils and collaborators to stage it. *7 Easy Pieces* (2005) was the next step, springing from a need and a duty, as the artist explains:

> "I feel the need not just to personally re-experience some performances from the past, but also to think about how they can be re-performed today in front of a public that never saw them. [...] After thirty years of performing, I feel like it is my duty to retell the story of performance art in a way that respects the past and also leaves space for reinterpretation." [6]

On one hand then, there is a personal need to 're-experience' some of her own and others' performances, while on the other the artist feels the duty to commit these experiences to history, at the same time detaching them from the mystification created by poor documentation:

> "Due to the dire conditions of performance art documentation, these substitutable media never did justice to the actual performances. The only real way to document a performance art piece is to re-perform the piece itself." [7]

But apart from Abramović's personal motivations, it is clear that reenacting performance art is only possible in the context of a renewed, extended conception of this art form. In the catalogue of the touring exhibition [8] *No lo llames performance / Don't Call it Performance* (2003), Paco Barragan lists eight points that he believes characterize performance art today.
Some of these are especially relevant to the practice of reenactment:

> "2. The action is of a 'portable' character, able to be reproduced in different environments and before different audiences. [...] 4. Loss of hierarchy: live action is not automatically valued above its recording. [...] 6. The 'remake' of given historical performances is not seen as a mere reproduction of the original action, it has become a new art form."

This new art form, while it often uses mediation (during both preparation and staging), therefore springs from a dynamic which is the exact opposite of mediation, namely the desire to recover the original in all its immediacy, and therefore in the only possible way: by experiencing it. It is a highly self-referential art form, in view of the fact that it takes place entirely within the art world, whether motivated by historicization, tribute or celebration, or by a desire to verify the validity of a given performance when set in another era, another arena, and with other actors.
The idea of repetition implicit in the "re" prefix tends to make us forget that the heart of every reenactment lies not in its fidelity to the original model, but in the differences between the original and the 'remake'.
These differences may be actively pursued (for example by changing the sex, age or nationality of the actors) or avoided, but are inevitable.

The concept of self-referencing, in particular, is fundamental to understanding this form of reenactment. It is in fact more of a "citation" or act of appropriation, rather than the restaging of an event or a theatrical reproduction. This happens because art is always a linguistic act, even when it becomes an event; and because this event, in the meantime, has in turn become a fetish object that can be plucked out of the sea of confusion that is our cultural panorama.
The motivations mentioned by Abramović, the reasons she gives for embracing the practice of reenactment, include an advertising campaign that appeared in *Vogue Italia*. Without her authorization the magazine had appropriated one of her performances, and the event, transformed into an image, became an icon, therefore able to be appropriated, recycled, repeated, relived [9]. This does not mean that reenactment is appropriation, citation, plagiarism or the like, but only that it relates to and dialogues with these artistic languages.
In its respect for the original event, and its attempt to bring it to life in a different context, reenactment is the way that performance art survives and makes its mark in the age of post-production [10].

History as an act

When it comes to reenactments of events outside the art world – be they historical events, distant or recent news items, experiments, literary excerpts, and so on, we enter a completely

different conceptual arena. The forms that this can take are in fact so different that at times gathering them all under a single term (reenactment) and confining them to a single operative arena (performance art) might seem specious and arbitrary. Another limiting factor, that many critics have lingered over, is the comparison between historic reenactments (reliving a past event, in virtue of its being in the past) and the artistic version (which relives a past event in view of the meaning this holds for the present) [11]. It might make more sense to talk about "reactivating" an event, or a sign: a term which is also legitimized by the verb "enact": this not only means "to act out (a role or play) on stage", but also, "to put into practice", often used with reference to a law coming into force. From this point of view reenactment is not so much, or not only, the restaging of an event, but its translation into an act: an act which may be, but is not necessarily, performance-based.

Reenactments of historic events are inevitably obliged to take account of other practices of reactivation belonging to popular culture, of which it sometimes takes on the approaches and forms. These practices include re-evocations, role-playing and cosplaying. Reevocations, which are particularly popular in English-speaking countries, often regard village fairs and the restaging of historical events belonging to a particular local context, which they stand out from for their aspirations to authenticity and historic accuracy [12]. Re-enactors, who often appear in the crowd scenes of historic films, carefully study the costumes, lifestyles and language of the era they want to reenact, and rather than restaging it, they actually relive it. Role-playing and cosplaying are only apparently less faithful to historic fact: in actual fact they often involve the same level of philological precision as historic reenactments, but with reference to a literary theme, usually linked to the fantasy genre, as seen in the first role-playing games, and later videogames. The level of identification with the game character is often so complete that it would put the top students at Actor's Studio to shame [13].

Among the other practices that reenactment occasionally takes on, we should not forget historical fakes, media hoaxes and film, in so far as it is make-believe based on reality. There are numerous examples of this, from the previously mentioned video-installation by Pierre Huyghe *The Third Memory*, where the actual event is constantly filtered by its cinematographic alter ego, to *Greenwich Degree Zero* (2006) by Rod Dickinson and Tom McCarthy: an installation that presents the documentation of an event which never actually happened. In short, Dickinson and McCarthy take up the story of a failed attack on Greenwich Observatory in 1894 by a French anarchist, and document it as if it really did take place, by manipulating the media of the day. Works like these demonstrate that in the practice of reenactment, references to events of the past resuscitated for the meaning they can acquire in the present is only one of the many possibilities [14].

While it is therefore evident that in reenactment the original event or "text" is not necessarily expressed in performance form, it is true that it always translates into a script or narrative, and that when this is staged as a performance it inevitably begs a comparison with theatre and its "suspension of disbelief" aspect. Performance-based reenactments use actors who know their parts

to perfection, sophisticated scripts and painstakingly reconstructed sets, so why not talk about theatre rather than performance art? The reason is that reenactment, while replicating a past event, is not about representation, but action: it does not want to be viewed as fiction, but as an authentic fact, something happening in the here and now. Performance-based reenactments do not take place in theatres or sets (arenas for representation) but in real-life venues, and by the same token the spectators are never an audience, but witnesses. Lastly, we could assert that reenactment does not tackle history and the original event in terms of creating an account or reproduction, but more in terms of taking a sample. The event itself is viewed as a ready-made that can be isolated, sampled, decontextualized and reproposed.

The topical nature of reenactment

We have yet to address the question of why the two lines of reenactment, apparently so mutually independent, took root in more or less the same period, and appear to capture the *zeitgeist* so aptly. In actual fact there are a few pointers: the renewed topicality of performance art, which has become one of the pillars of the spectacular system of art and its peculiar economy; the fact that our experience of history is by and large mediated, which on one hand increases our desire for "real events", and on the other has got us accustomed to reliving the same events over and over, simply by pressing "replay". Then there is life itself, which on one hand is increasingly based on mediated experiences, and on the other is often based on nothing other than the remediation of a media model.
The videos of the Palestinian kamikazes are all pretty much alike, and have now become a model on which teen psychopaths without a cause base their messages, uploading them to Youtube before dashing into school, gun in hand. The Columbine massacre remediated a shoot-up in a videogame, and in *Elephant* Gus Van Sant restaged the images from the school's security cameras. Peggy Phelan offers a highly interesting analysis of the attempted shooting of Reagan as the remediation of a series of narrative events, films (*Taxi Driver*), and real events obsessively regurgitated by the media, like the Kennedy assassination – connections which gain even more significance when you think of the role the media began to play in American democracy precisely as of the Reagan administration – under a president who was a former film star [15].

In other words reenactment is actually the art form *par excellence* in a society where mediation has triumphed completely over direct experience, and has stealthily taken over everyday life. The appeal of reenactment lies in its very ambiguity, in how it manages to be both a confirmation of the power of the media and an illusory *revanche* of direct experience.

Lastly the concept of history as readymade introduced in the previous paragraph, leads us to consider reenactment as one of the many forms assumed by what Nicolas Bourriaud has identified as the predominant form of contemporary art in the information age: post-production. In this sense reenactment could be seen as one of the products of that new form of culture that Bourriaud calls the "culture of use or culture of activity", in which:

> "[...] the artwork functions as the temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements, like a narrative that extends and reinterprets preceding narratives. [...] Going beyond its traditional role as a receptacle of the artist's vision, it now functions as an active agent, a musical score, an unfolding scenario [...]. In generating behaviors and potential reuses, art challenges passive culture, composed of merchandise and consumers. " [16]

Isolating the re-

Connecting the phenomenon of reenactment with the more generic concept of postproduction means opening our eyes to a broader horizon than that indicated by this term: a horizon defined not as before, by the concept of 'updating' something, but by the semantic arena evoked by that short prefix at the start of the word. This is the context of the work developed in the *RE:akt!* platform. The idea of repetition is just one of the concepts implied by this particle. There are other interesting ideas which run alongside it, such as "response", and "reaction".
All of the works in the *RE:akt!* platform bring an event (artistic or otherwise) 'up to date', and also respond or react to that event. And lastly, they offer a wider meta-reflection on the idea of action (Re-garding act). More than just reenactment, then: rather, as Duchamp described art, "a game among men of all eras".

notes

[1] One classic example is *The Third Memory* (1999), the video-installation by Pierre Huyghe in which John Woytowiczs' hold-up in the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York in August 1972 is restaged by the same protagonist, with constant references to the film of the story, *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) by Sidney Lumet, starring Al Pacino.

[2] Here there are numerous examples. Naturally, if events of the past only exist for us in mediated form, we should not be surprised if what is restaged is not the actual event but the media artefact that conveys it.

[3] Take the videogame *Waco Resurrection*, for example, which was produced in 2004 by the American team c-level (Eddo Stern, Peter Brinson, Brody Condon, Michael Wilson, Mark Allen and Jessica Hutchins). The game is a classic shoot 'em up which enables the player to relive first hand the massacre of the Branch Davidians by the FBI, in the role of the leader of the sect David Koresh. Thanks to the immersive nature of videogames, each session of play consists in a reenactment of the actual events, rendered particularly realistic by the faces of the characters, based on the real people involved, and the soundtrack which plays through the headphones.

[4] Quoted in Michael Rush, *New Media in Late 20th Century Art*, 1999, Thames & Hudson Ltd, London, p. 52.

[5] In AAVV, *Marina Abramović. 7 Easy Pieces*, exhibition catalogue, Charta, Milan 2007, p. 15.

[6] Ibid., p. 10.

[7] Ibid., p. 11.

[8] Organized by the Audiovisuals Department of the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía Nacional (Madrid, Spain), and presented there in 2003, the show travelled to Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (Seville, Spain), Centro Párraga (Murcia, Spain) and El Museo del Barrio (New York, USA). See Paco Barragan, *No Lo Llames Performance, Don't Call It Performance*, El Museo del Barrio, New York 2004.

[9] The campaign, by Steven Meisel, was inspired by *Relation in Space* (1976) and published in issue 579 of *Vogue Italia*, in November 1998. See AAVV, *Marina Abramović. 7 Easy Pieces*, quoted, pag. 8.

[10] With regards to the relationship between reenactment and plagiarism see, in this book, the section dedicated to Eva and Franco Mattes, pp. 111-116.

[11] See Inke Arns, "History Will Repeat Itself", in Inke Arns, Gabriele Horn (eds), *History Will Repeat Itself. Strategies of reenactment in contemporary (media) art and performance*, exhibition catalogue, Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2007.

[12] Historic reenactment is explored at length by Sven Lütticken in his essay "An Arena in Which To Reenact", in Sven Lütticken (ed), *Life, Once More. Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, exhibition catalogue, Witte de With, Rotterdam 2005, pp. 17-60. Lütticken traces a line between the phenomenon of the "pageant" – the Medieval reli gious representations on floats – and the battle reenactments which became popular in the 1960s, first in the US and then in Britain, underlining their historicist nature: "Reenactments are happenings. At a time when pop art, Fluxus and minimalism celebrated the now,

reenactments tried to create an experience of the past as present, or as much present as possible" (ibid, p. 27).

[13] This extraordinary immersive capacity, which leaves us in no doubt over how real role-players perceive their fantasy worlds to be, greatly struck the American artist Brody Condon, who in summer 2008, on occasion of Sonsbeek 2008: Grandeur International public sculpture exhibition, orchestrated *Twentyfivefold Manifestation*, a massive performance involving around 80 actors, based on a series of ritual type "games". For more information see http://www.sonsbeeklive.org/

[14] In the *RE:akt!* platform, reenactment as the progression of a media hoax is the fulcrum of the project SS-XXX | *Die Frau Helga. The Borghild Project Reconstruction*, while the reference to cinematographic narration returns in *C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)*, both by Janez Janša. See the sections in question for a more detailed analysis of these approaches to reenactment.

[15] See Peggy Phelan, "Hinkley and Ronald Reagan: Reenactment and the Ethics of the Real", in Sven Lütticken (ed), *Life, Once More. Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, quoted.

[16] See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction. Culture as screenplay: how art reprograms the world*, 2002.
Online at http://itp.nyu.edu/isco/pdfs/Bourriaud-Postproduction.pdf

RE:akt!

Reconstruction, Re-enactment, Re-reporting

Actions

TEXTS BY

Domenico Quaranta

Action #1
www.reakt.org/berlin

SilentCell Network
Ich Lubbe Berlin!

"In times of urgency you have no choice but to choose from the options that those in power present to you." [1]

— Jan Verwoert

Reichstag fire

Berlin, 27 February 1933
Photo: Internet

Berlin, 27 February 1933. Adolf Hitler has just become Chancellor, but Germany remains, at least officially, a Republic. At 9.25 pm a fire station receives a worrying alert: the Reichstag, the seat of the German parliament, is on fire. When the police arrive, in the building they find Marinus Van Der Lubbe, a Dutch revolutionary Communist who has recently arrived in Germany. When Hitler, who is dining with Goebbels, receives the news, he immediately interprets it as the sign of a Bolshevik conspiracy against the fragile German nation. The next day, while the papers describe the fire as "the most monstrous act of Bolshevik terrorism in Germany", Hitler passes the *Reichstag Fire Decree*, appealing to the state of emergency, and suspending the majority of civil rights.
The next step was the Leipzig trial, where the Nazi party attempted to ascribe responsibility for this apparently isolated act carried out by Van der Lubbe to Comintern, also accusing three Bulgarian Communists: Georgi Dimitrov, Blagoi Popov and Vassil Tanev. Sentenced to death, Van der Lubbe was decapitated on 10 January 1934. History's view of the Reichstag fire is still somewhat controversial. While historians agree on the involvement of Van der Lubbe, it is not yet clear whether he acted alone or under the orders of a third party. But just who was Marinus Van der Lubbe? A crazed pyromaniac, as claimed by Soviet propaganda, and in the 60s, the journalist Fritz Tobias? A Communist working for Comintern, as the Nazis asserted? Or the scapegoat in a plot hatched by the Gestapo, as the German historians Bahar and Kugel attempted to prove in the 90s? One thing for sure is that the Nazis benefited enormously from the Reichstag fire, which in actual fact paved the way for the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship[2].

12 December 2005. At 10.39 Mare Van der Lubbe (the pseudonym of Mare Bulc, member of the Slovenian artistic collective SilentCell Network) reenacts the Reichstag fire. It is not a canonical re-enactment, for obvious reasons: not only due to the historic ambiguity of events, but also its terrorist nature – any attempt to stage it literally would actually be another attack. This is why SilentCell Network opted for a

Action #1

SilentCell Network
Ich Lubbe Berlin!

2006
Digital video
Courtesy: Intima Virtual Base
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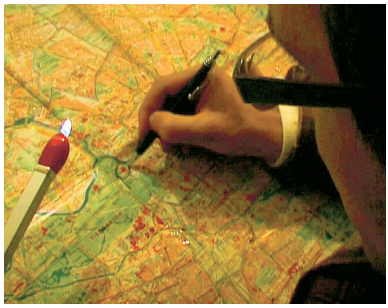
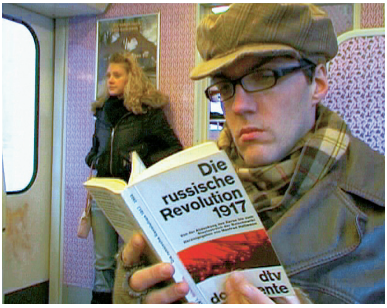
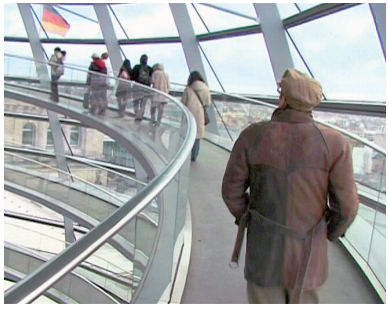






SilentCell Network
Ich Lubbe Berlin!

Berlin, 2005
Performance
Photo: Janez Janša
Courtesy: Intima Virtual Base

"diminished" re-enactment, which could be described as "symbolic". It is significant that SilentCell Network also avoids playing with the sources, interfering with the event's posthumous history, namely with its historic reconstruction, as happens in other works in the *RE:akt!* platform. However it would not be exact to interpret this re-enactment as a simple parody. On the contrary, SilentCell Network seems interested in re-interpreting the Reichstag fire in the light of a present that has much in common with the situation generated by the original event. Like 1934 Germany, we too are the children of a terrorist attack, that some have described as the 21st century's greatest work of art. We too live in a state of emergency, with Western democracies "forced" by terrorism to pass legislation which severely limits its citizens' freedom of thought and action, and interferes with their privacy.

We too find ourselves forced to make radical, final decisions in a context where the distinction between good and evil is increasingly blurred. As Jan Verwoert wrote: "In times of crisis, events of historical importance always seem to be impending and thus decisions always seem pressing. 'Are you with (the) US or against (the) US?', the president asks, demanding an answer right away... In times of urgency you have no choice but to choose from the options that those in power present to you." [3]
In times of crisis, Mare Van der Lubbe knows that for liberty to survive, it must

Action #1

SilentCell Network
Ich Lubbe Berlin!
Berlin, 2005
Performance
Photo: Janez Janša
Courtesy: Intima Virtual Base

assume subtle guises and a veneer of conformism, and adopt a playful, ironic approach. It was in this spirit that on 11 December 2005, he left Ljubljana Airport, heading for Berlin. Fearlessly he faced the check-in controls, controls that, like the symbol on the plane's safety instructions indicating that flammable liquids must not be taken onboard – should serve to guarantee the safety of travellers, but end up merely generating an attack of nerves. Like any normal tourist, Mare passed through the non-places on the way to his destination, distractedly taking in the symbols, gestures and messages that organize, plan and control our daily lives: the airport signage, passport control, the map of the underground. Once in the underground he became immersed in a book on the Russian revolution, the symbol of a threat that afflicted the Western world for many years, before it was defeated by the events of history.
The same is true of Mare, whose actions at the Reichstag – the emblem of the rebirth of Germany after the wall came down, and visited by thousands of tourists every day – do not now represent a source of fear. His protest is not disruptive, like that of his predecessor 77 years previously, nor does it spark off any explosive political consequences. No-one notices him but the neutral eye of the camera that follows him from the start of his journey, while he throws little cardboard flames into the bins around the Reichstag. His gesture is minimal and silent, but this is precisely where its power lies: he moves away from the choice between black or white, in search of a third way, a less significant but effective third way. His action takes the form of a minimal comment, a note in the margin of a system of control which gets progressively more ambiguous the more it hides behind the pretext of an alleged "state of emergency".

notes

[1] Jan Verwoert, "The Crisis of Time in Times of Crisis", in Anke Bagma, Steve Rushton, Florian Wüst (eds), *Experience Memory Re-enactment*, Piet Zwart Institute 2005, pp. 37- 40. Re-published here, pp. 35-39.
[2] For the details of this reconstruction, see the *Wikipedia* entry for "Reichstag Fire" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichstag_fire
[3] Jan Verwoert, "The Crisis of Time in Times of Crisis", quoted.

Action #2

www.reakt.org/daskapital

Janez Janša
Das KAPITAL

"Marx's assertion that capital transforms human dignity into a commodity has never seemed truer than now." [1]

— Pier Paolo Pasolini

A street artist is a re-interpreter for hire. His or her work consists in re-interpreting – often only for a few pence – a character, icon, scene or historical event, ad infinitum, for the benefit of passing tourists (a typical product of our consumer society). The payback, for the latter, lies in recognizing the icon or event in question as part of their own culture, and in seeing it presented in an accessible, human and vaguely ludicrous form.

Attracting six million visitors a year, Prague, the modern day capital of the Czech Republic, is one of the hot destinations for cultural tourism. Its appeal lies not only in its Habsburg history (as the golden city, and the city of the hundred towers) and its magical aura (the Jewish cemetery, the legend of Golem), but also in its more recent past. What occurred between January and August 1968 – the extraordinary period of liberalization known as the Prague Spring which was bloodily repressed by the troops of the Warsaw Pact on 20 August 1968 – was one of the Soviet block's first signs of weakness. When the Soviet Union entered the city with more than 7,000 armoured vehicles to quash the Czechoslovakian Communist Party's internal reform, it inflicted a deep wound on the conscience of the western left, while in the capitalist democracies the martyrs of the moment were viewed as heroes, including Alexander Dubček, leader of the reformists, and the student Jan Palach [2], who burned himself to death on 16 January 1969 in Wenceslas Square as a political protest. After Palach's death the Czechoslovakian authorities initiated a process of *damnatio memoriae*, and attempts to rehabilitate his memory only began in 1989, when there were demonstrations on the anniversary of his death, which preceded the so-called Velvet Revolution, in November of the same year. A memorial cross was erected in his honour in front of the National Museum, at the exact spot where he fell, and there is an asteroid named after him. His story is linked to that of Jan Hus, a Bohemian religious thinker burnt at the stake in 1415 for his ideas. In 2003 Palach was even emulated by some Czech teenagers, for reasons as yet unknown.

Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia

Prague, 20 August 1968
Photo: Internet

Action #2

Janez Janša
DAS Kapital
2007
Installation
Photo: Janez Janša
Courtesy: Aksioma

Given these circumstances, on 7 October 2006 the tourists in Wenceslas Square were probably not overly surprised to see the performer Mare Bulc staging Palach's spectacular suicide in typical street artist style. They would however have been struck by some of the details orchestrated by the Slovenian artist Janez Janša. The performer was up on a pedestal, holding a remote control which controlled both the movements of a toy tank, and a fan hidden inside the pedestal. There was a little camera mounted on the tank to film the action, along with the logo of the performance, which was entitled *Das KAPITAL*. The fan started up as soon as the tank passed over a large map on the ground representing the territory of the Czech Republic, at which point fabric flames rose up, celebrating Palach's martyrdom.

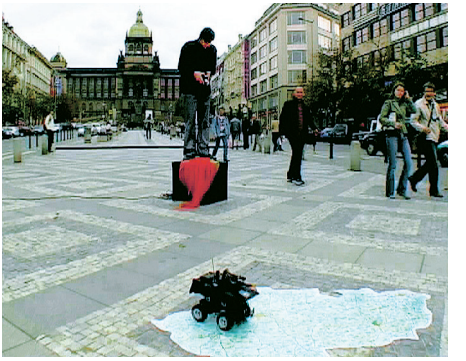
The meaning of *Das KAPITAL* seems to be hidden behind a screen of banality (the street artist staging Palach's sacrifice to entertain tourists). It is all in the details, even the tiniest ones. Take the name and the logo of the performance, for example. *Das Kapital* is the German title of Karl Marx's *Capital*, held to be the founding work of Marxism. In the performance logo, the name takes the form of a tank, and the red star of Communism symbolises a shot being fired. The symbolism is evident, almost scholastic: both the Soviet troops and the

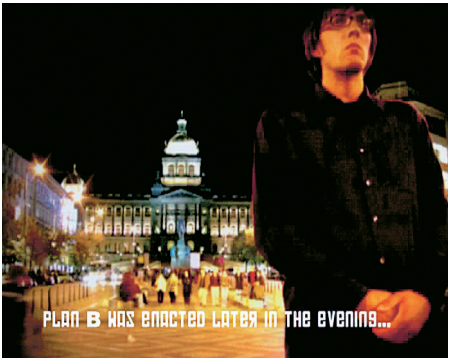
Czechoslovakian student are fighting to defend their own interpretation of the same utopia. From this point of view, *Das KAPITAL* could be viewed as a metaphorical translation of Palach's gesture, rather than a simple re-interpretation. But there is more to it than that.

The tank does not enter the map of Czechoslovakia as it was in 1968, but that of the geopolitical form the country assumed in 1993, when after the fall of Communism Czechoslovakia split into two separate countries – the Czech Republic and Slovakia. And it was then that Prague suffered yet another invasion, that of Western capital – which was heavily invested in post-Communist countries, with many businesses moving there – and liberal capitalism.

The current face of the city has been strongly influenced by this invasion, and Prague's current economy, based on tourism and its use as a film set for international production companies, is the most glaring evidence of it. Thus the metaphor of the performance becomes allegory: an event of the past is translated into symbolic form and used to talk about the present. In other words, in Janez Janša's remake Jan Palach is no longer protesting against the invasion of Marx's *Capital*, but capital in general [3], which is transforming the city and the lifestyle of its inhabitants. It does this by adopting a language that addresses tourists (the

Janez Janša
DAS Kapital
2006
Digital video
Courtesy: Aksioma





living, omnipresent symbol of this invasion) and means (toys and technology) which are also emblematic of the new invasion. In a single gesture, the city's history is vulgarized and abridged for the tourists while at the same time being used symbolically to combat its present. Which is probably what Jan Palach's modern day emulators were trying to do, as victims of the consumer society, not unlike the students involved in school shootings.

notes

[1] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Lo storico discorsetto di Castelgandolfo", *Corriere della Sera*, 22 September 1974.
[2] For Jan Palach, see *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Palach.
[3] The police must also have realised this, as they attempted to stop the performance, making it more difficult to document.

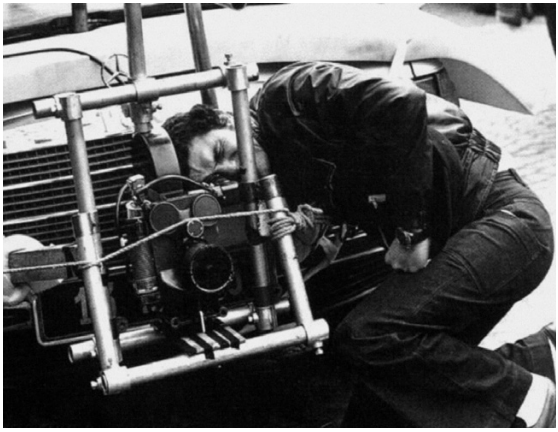
Janez Janša
DAS Kapital (detail)
2006
Digital video
Courtesy: Aksioma

Action #3
RENDEZ-VOUS DES
Au Rendez-vous des Artistes
www.reakt.org/rendezvous

Janez Janša
C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)

"No differently from a map, the joke shows a condensed version of the techniques which enable us to change a life form. But it shows them while it too is using them to do something unexpected." [1]

— Paolo Virno



Claude Lelouch
C'était un rendez-vous
Paris, 1976
Making of
Courtesy: Claude Lelouch / Les Films 13

The dynamics of a re-enactment depend on the driving force behind it: the accent may be on the fidelity of the remake, on its being situated in a different spatial/temporal context, or on the characteristics of the protagonists.

From this point of view, *C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)* is a re-enactment decidedly *sui generis*. As we will see, on one (evident) level the practice of re-enactment has been betrayed at the very moment in which it appears to have been adopted to the letter: the title, location and dynamics of the original are all taken up, but the re-enactment rejects the most distinctive feature of the original, what made it so exceptional (the speed). On another (hidden) level, Janez Janša's project tackles, to the letter, the mythology which sprang up around the original event, tracing its complex dynamics step by step. In this case, as we will see, the main difference once again regards intensity and pace. So to the facts of the matter.

In 1976 the French film maker Claude Lelouch created a short film, only nine minutes long, entitled *C'était un rendez-vous*. The film, which was shot in Paris in the early hours of the morning, is a breakneck spin through the city streets, filmed from a subjective angle by a camera mounted on the front of the car, which we never see. The race starts at Porte Dauphine, from a tunnel on the ring road, and passes in front of well-known sights in the centre of Paris, from the Arc de Triomphe to the Opéra Garnier, from Place de la Concorde to the Champs-Élysées – finishing in Montmartre, by the parapet in front of the Basilique du Sacré-Cœur. At this point the driver gets out of the car just in time to sweep an attractive blonde into his arms. During its mad dash, the car terrifies pedestrians, frightens the pigeons and breaks just about all the rules of the highway code, disregarding traffic lights and one way streets, mounting the pavement and doing some dangerous overtaking. We never see the car, but the roar of the engine is clearly that of a Ferrari.

The movie, which was not cut, and lasts the length of a single roll of film, became an icon of the so-called "cinéma-vérité", and its introductory statement is an explicit declaration of this: "le film que vous allez voir a été réalisé sans aucun trucage ni accéléré." The director was accused of taking no account of the lives of animals and pedestrians, and encouraging viewers to disregard the rules of the highway code and civil life.

In April 2007, the Slovenian artist Janez Janša went to Paris to shoot a remake of *C'était un rendez-vous*. Like the original, the video lasts 9 minutes, has the same soundtrack, is preceded by the same caption and features the same route used by Lelouch. The difference can be seen in the camera's point of view, which is much closer to road level, and at the end of the video, when the vehicle stops and we come face to face with the waiting date: not an attractive blonde this time, but a tortoise. According to Janša, the remake was filmed with the camera mounted on the shell of a "Golden Greek" tortoise, accompanying its "race" through the streets (at a speed which never exceeded 0.32 km/h) and then compressing the film to 9 minutes. Like in the original, "red lights are ignored, one-way streets are violated and centre lines are crossed."

If Janša's work stopped here, we would be looking at a classic case of parody: an original event taken up and reworked in an apparently literal way, but upending the essential elements to comic effect: the thrill of speed reduced to an exasperating crawl, and the legendary aura of cinéma vérité debunked in the fictional nature of video, which compressed a couple of months' shooting into a few minutes and "constructs" the impression of speed by using the original soundtrack. Even the breaches of the highway code appear comic, when the perpetrator is a tortoise which has to be directed and protected by a team of crouching helpers, who take on not only the Parisian traffic, but also the comprehensible protests of the police, traditionally insensible to the demands of art.

In actual fact the video only took a few days to shoot, rather than a few months, in view of the fact that in any case compressing the images would have caused the loss of most of the film. And a toy lawnmower was used, rather than a tortoise. These production cheats do not spring purely from the need to simplify things, but represent another side of the story, and were intentionally revealed only recently, almost two years after the re-enactment was filmed. But why?

With *C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)*, Janez Janša did not just create a remake of a media artefact, namely Claude Lelouch's film. The reinterpretation does not view *C'était un rendez-vous* as a finished artefact, but as an open work, which includes the production process and the legends it has generated, and skillfully managed, for more than 30 years. In 1976, a stone was thrown into the pool of western culture, a culture

Claude Lelouch
C'était un rendez-vous

Paris, 1976
Short movie
Courtesy: Claude Lelouch
/ Les Films 13

Janez Janša
C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)

Paris, 2007
Digital video
Courtesy: Aksioma

powerfully conditioned by our means of communication. Janša tackles the ripples produced by this stone, before looking at the actual stone itself. And to understand the work we must look to those very ripples.

After the first showing of the film, Lelouch was arrested, for having filmed without the necessary permits, and throughout the 80s the film circulated mainly in underground channels. In 1992, Pyramid Film and Video distributed a low quality video tape at the record price of 50 dollars, making it one of the most expensive videos in circulation. Little is known of the arrest, and although it is taken as read by various sources, including *Wikipedia* [2], it could well be another of the many rumours spread to enhance the film's appeal. One of these was that the car used was a Ferrari 275 GTB, driven for the occasion by a Formula 1 driver. Only later did Lelouch reveal that he drove the car himself, and, for the record, it was not a Ferrari, but a Mercedes-Benz

City officials rejected Lelouch's application to close the necessary streets. Undaunted, he decided to do it without permission and take his chances, reducing the risks by shooting at 5:30 on a morning in August, the month when almost all of Paris shuts down for vacation. The most dangerous part of the route would be the ticket-window area at the Louvre, where there was zero visibility at the courtyard's exit onto the Rue de Rivoli. An assistant, Elie Chouraqui, stood watch over the exit with a walkie-talkie...

The shoot went off as planned. With no signal from Chouraqui as he approached the exit of the Louvre's courtyard, Lelouch floored it and roared through the gates. After the rendez-vous, Lelouch headed back to collect Chouraqui and found him fiddling with the walkietalkie. "What's up?" Lelouch asked. "It's this piece of crap!" replied the assistant, pointing to the walkie-talkie. "It broke down at the start of the take!"

Lelouch confessed to being the driver: "Of course. People were exhilarated by the action but morally outraged by the method. I can't say I blame them. It was my film, and I was fully prepared to take the risks." He was also arrested for his exploits. "They took a look at the film, and the chief of police called me in"; Lelouch recounted. "He read me a list of all the offenses I'd committed. It was never-ending. When he finished, he gave me a black look and asked for my driver's license.

He contemplated it for a few moments, then gave it back with a large smile on his face. He said, 'I promised I would take your license, but I didn't say for how long.' I was stupefied. It was a symbolic punishment. Then he added, 'My children love your little film.' "

From *Automobile*, November 2003

450SEL 6.9, driven at a fairly high speed (140 km/h), but not as fast as Lelouch had previously asserted (230 – 240 km/h). This revelation, accompanied by a photograph showing Lelouch mounting a camera on the bonnet of a Mercedes, came in 2003, when he distributed the film on DVD, relaunching its popularity. The fame of the film has grown over the years, above all thanks to the interest of car buffs (rather than fans of experimental cinema), who adore the film and are intrigued by its contradictions: the evident stability of the camera, for example, would be all but impossible on the declared model of car (the Ferrari 275 GTB), pointing to the use of a different make of car, while when the distance (10.42 km) and the journey time (7:57 minutes) are worked out, the average speed would actually only be 78.64 km/h [3]. The revelations of 2003 aimed to respond to these queries and debates, which had found a natural home on the net, but rather than resolving them, they actually added more fuel to the fire.

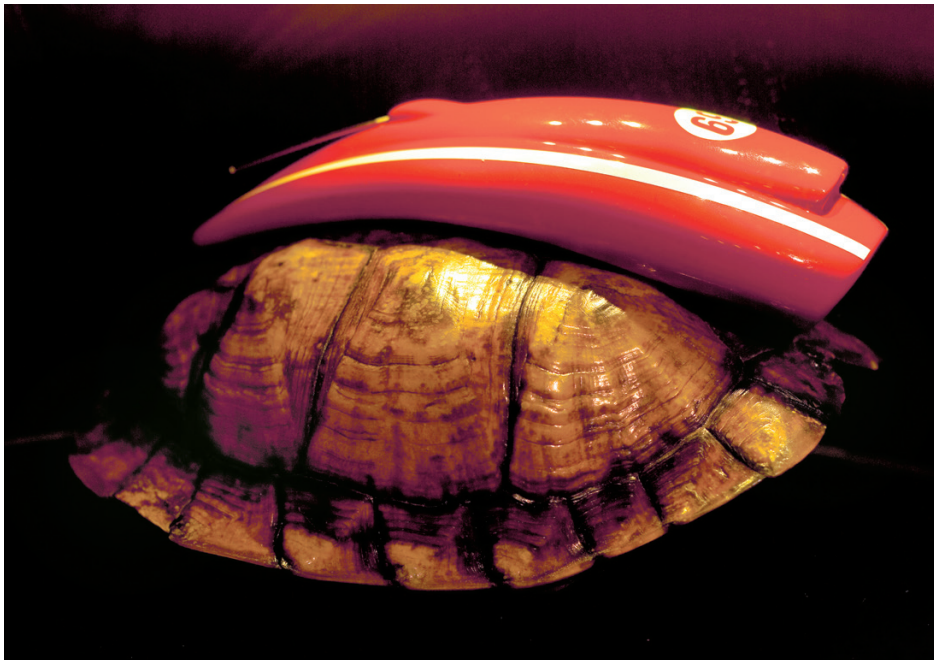
The legend of *C'était un rendez-vous* also includes the scandalized reactions of those who objected that Lelouch had endangered the lives of others and his own. *Wikipedia* explains: "Comments attributed to Lelouch indicate that he acknowledges the moral outrage over his method of shooting this film as valid. He also states that he was prepared to take the risks in making the film, but that he was also ready to drop if he came across any unexpected risk (pedestrian, hurdle, etc.)."

What is evident today is that the legends that the film's success drew on – speed and cinéma vérité – were exactly that: the speed reached by the car (and therefore the sense of danger) should be considerably scaled down, and is the result of an artfully constructed soundtrack which is not by any means authentic.

Janez Janša
C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)
Paris, 2007
Making of
Photo: Marcela Okretič
Courtesy: Aksioma

In other words, the statement at the start of the film is a lie, and one of the pilasters of cinéma vérité is actually a masterpiece of cinematographic pretence.

Janez Janša's re-enactment tackles this legend and the dynamics involved in its construction. His *Rendez-vous* is not a simple remake of the previous version, but a tribute to the way it has been constructed. On one level (the creation of the film), there is a vast difference between what is declared and what actually happens: the use of Lelouch's soundtrack (applied to the progress of a tortoise) and video compression, makes the declaration of authenticity that opens the remake a purely decorative detail, but a detail which is capable of casting the same aura of falsity over the original. On another level (the construction of the legend), Janša's work is even more interesting, as it tackles largely unpredictable dynamics (what makes a cultural product into a cult object?), having abandoned what gave rise to them in the first place. If the success of Lelouch's film, as we



Janez Janša
C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)
MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art
Bucharest, 2009
Installation (detail)
Photo: George Vasilache
Courtesy: MNAC

have seen, is linked to nigh on 30 years of secrecy, and to the ambiguity between fact and fiction, and to car enthusiasts, how can we replicate it if we deliberately eliminate these three elements? In actual fact Janša is not interested in achieving the same result, just recreating the mechanism. His reconstruction does not have to have the same impact as the original, but springs from the desire to analyse that impact – to expose its workings as dispassionately as an instruction manual or flow chart.

Thus, before filming his tribute, Janša applied for the necessary permits, which were obviously not granted. He decided to go ahead anyway, generating turmoil in Paris, provoking scandalized reactions among environmentalists and getting stopped several times by the police. The official press release reads: "If the movie was indeed filmed as Janša claims, it might indicate a criminally reckless disregard for the life and safety of the tortoise. Comments attributed to the artist indicate that he acknowledges the moral outrage over his method of shooting this movie as valid. He also states that he was prepared to take the risks in making the movie. During the shooting process Janša was opposed by activists of BBF for the Welfare and Protection of Animals, objecting to the author's disregard for animals' rights, and stopped by police officers. He was given a large fine, the amount of which he refused to disclose." [4]

When this statement was released, the net swung into action. The debate focused on one hand on the ethics of the operation – was it right to risk the life of a living being in

Janez Janša
C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)
2009
Digital render
Rendering:
Andrea Kršul / RPS d.o.o.
Ljubljana

the name of art? On the other hand, enthusiasts began to ponder how many days it would take to travel almost 11 km at a speed of 0.32 km/h, and look for external documentation confirming the existence of the experiment: photos taken by curious tourists, amateur videos on Youtube.

Two years later, Janša resolved the enigma, producing the photo that shows him with the toy car he used to shoot the video, in place of the tortoise. The shell of the latter, complete with film camera and GPS transmitter, appears in the work that tells the story of *C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)* in exhibition form: a glass case containing the video playing, synchronized with a list of the streets covered by the lead character and a satellite map of the route. This high tech fetish object is an emblem for a story that shifts, like the original that inspired it, between reality and media representation, where reality looks like a fabrication, and fabrications look real.

notes

[1] Paolo Virno, *Motto di spirito e azione innovativa*, Bollati Boringhieri, Milano 2005, pp. 93-94.
[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Lelouch. For more information on the film, see also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C%27%C3%A9tait_un_rendez-vous
[3] In this case the source is the page dedicated to the film on the site *Internet Movie Database (IMDB)*: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0169173/trivia. A detailed study of the speed reached by the car can be found in the article by Belgrave, et al., "Speed of a Car: C'était un rendez-vous", in *The Physics Factbook*, 2005, online at http://hypertextbook.com/facts/2005/Rendezvous.shtml; as for the two models of car mentioned thus far, see the article "Most Radical Car Movie of All Time", in *Dark Roasted Blend*, 14 November 2007, online at http://www.darkroastedblend.com/2007/11/most-radical-car-movie-of-alltime.html.
[4] See http://www.reakt.org/rendezvous/index.html

Action #4

www.reakt.org/vd

Vaginal Davis
VD as VB

"I am not interested in entertainment. I am not interested in ENTERTAINMENT. I am not INTERESTED in ENTERTAINMENT." [1]

— Vaginal Davis

VBSS.001.mp
Vanessa Beecroft

2006
Madonna with Twins, Rumbek, Sudan
Photographed by Matthu Placek
© Vanessa Beecroft 2008

Unlike a re-enactment of a historical event, which is concerned with the event and its traditions, the re-enactment of a performance necessarily entails a certain level of self-referencing. It is inevitable: the first concern regards the performance, the dynamics it sparks, the critical debate arising from it, the work of the artist and his or her position in art history, and then in second place come the issues raised by the work, the story it tells. The medium prevails over the message. All of this is especially true when the original is particularly recent, and has withstood the scrutiny of the institutions and the market but not yet that of history.
In such cases a re-enactment inevitably risks becoming part of the critical success of the original, becoming part of its hype, functioning as a kind of explanatory note. For this reason, anyone undertaking this kind of re-enactment has to be fairly ingenuous (whether emulator or fan) or brave. Courage is one thing that Vaginal Davis certainly does not lack, having cut her teeth on the Los Angeles drag scene before moving to Berlin, where she currently lives. Davis is an Afro-American drag queen, who over the last twenty years has been performance artist, actress, curator, musician and writer. Jennifer Doyle offers an incisive portrait of her in the book *Sex Objects*, which provides an in-depth examination of her works: "Her presence, her voice, her charisma are all larger than life, amplified by an Amazonian physique. Well over six feet tall, she towers above her entourage. She is incredible to watch, partly because she welds a hard and intricate version of femininity to a super-sized black body: she could be Edith Piaf's mulatta gay brother, magnified." [2].
In January 2000, on occasion of *GIMP*, the "performance art boutique" organized by Davis and her friend and fellow artist Ron Athey, she organized a performance inspired by Vanessa Beecroft's *VB39* (1999), in which the Italian artist presented uniformed American marines for the first time. In July 2000, on occasion of her participation in the Whitney Biennial, Beecroft staged a similar performance at the Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum in New York.

At the time Vanessa Beecroft was a rising star in the international artistic firmament. Her elaborate performances had been round the world, garnering the most coveted stages, and were gaining institutional recognition. Her formula today remains the same, with a few – but significant – variations: she exhibits bodies, set out in orderly rows, or apparently at random, usually models who are completely naked or wearing a few selected items of clothing, often haute couture. The models are given a few simple instructions: no eye contact with spectators, and no looking directly at the video or camera recording the event; to look impassible, vaguely bored; to remain standing for as long as possible, and not to speak. Beecroft's performances relate to the context where they are staged: the venue and its history, and the aesthetic and cultural models it reflects or promotes. Ever-obsessed with issues connected to the body and its compliance with certain aesthetic canons, Vanessa Beecroft explores the links between art and sexuality, the commercialization of beauty, and the economies of desire, art and voyeurism. However her works are not a critique, in so far as they lack a polemical vein and moral 'clarity': they possess the ethical ambiguity typical of much mainstream art, which has entered the economy of luxury and a system of specularity, not opposing it, but rather choosing to address it from an oblique angle.
This is why Beecroft, who is an attentive observer of advertising and the aesthetic strategies of designer fashion, is in turn also a source of inspiration for the advertising world. This is why the art establishment loves her in public, while secretly loathing her, feeding into the hype that surrounds her. And this is why the images of her performances around the turn of the millennium have acquired iconic status, like few other contemporary works of art have managed to.

One of the most significant characteristics of the Beecroft phenomenon, and many other darlings of the art world (Matthew Barney, for example) is the impossibility of separating the work from the persona. And although Vanessa Beecroft hardly ever appears in her performances, her habit of entitling all her works with her own initials (VB), followed by a serial number, is an explicit invitation to view them as self portraits. For this reason, in her works entitled "VD as VB", Vaginal Davis does more than just tackle individual performances, but reworks (and subverts) the entire VB phenomenon: the artist as celebrity and the subject of gossip, fully integrated not only into the art world, but also the realm of communications and advertising; the ritual nature of the performances, from the selection mechanism to the rules for the models (detachment, silence, endurance, etc.), and the cold, refined aesthetic of the images.

The subversion occurs by means of various strategies, the first of which is a change of "context": VB's performances are staged in leading galleries (from the Deitch to the Gagosian), museums or elegant, prestigious venues – like Vinsebeck Castle for *VB61* – while Davis puts on her performances in gay clubs, alternative venues or marginal art galleries. In these contexts the reference to the original performances may or may not

be decodable, on various levels. Davis uses this situation to great effect, in order to break out of the vicious circle of self-referencing, and direct the audience's focus to the issues raised by her own performance. Beecroft's level of fame has transformed her works into a cultural stereotype, reworked for advertising purposes by the main glossy magazines, and this makes Davis's version legible to those who have never heard of VB, or have only superficial knowledge of her works. This can be observed in *VD as VB - Erdgeist, Earth Spirit #27-29 10827*, performed in June 2007 at the Kapelica Gallery in Ljubljana, a no-profit exhibition venue which attracts both the establishment and the general public. This performance was inspired by *VB53*, produced in 2004 by the Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery of Florence. On that occasion Beecroft, in the middle of the Tepidarium in Florence, an elegant, airy 19th century structure in iron and glass, installed a heap of dark earth, upon which models, in the usual sculpturesque poses, and wearing high-heeled sandals and long wigs,

VB53.015.nt, Vanessa Beecroft

2004
VB53, Performance, Tepidarium, Giardino dell'Orticultura, Florence, Italy
Photographed by Nic Tenwiggenhorn
© Vanessa Beecroft 2008

Vaginal Davis
VD as VB - Erdgeist, Earth Spirit #27-29 10827

Kapelica gallery, Ljubljana, 2007
Performance
Photo: Nada Žgank / Memento
Courtesy: Aksioma

offered themselves to the public eye. The image drew explicitly on the Renaissance iconography of Mary Magdalene, observed by Beecroft in a museum in Florence. The artist, as usual, did not take part in the performance. [3]

In *Erdgeist*, on the other hand, the artist is present, right in the middle of the stage. After a recorded programmatic-type statement which proclaims the 'impotency of expression' [4], she introduces herself as Vanessa Beecroft, with a hilarious imitation of the artist's ingenuous, understated manner ("Please forgive my English, I am Italian and I do not speak English very well") before going on to deny various stories about her love life: "I must also lay a disclaimer that I have not been involved in an illicit sexual love affair with fellow artist Matthew Barney... The father of my child Isabella is Damien Hirst, not Matthew Barney." What might seem an improbable, purely satirical, reference, to the pervasive presence of gossip in the art world (as in all other communities), is actually a key element in all of Davis's works, which show her interest in the social function of gossip, and its role in the creation of celebrities. She continues with a sort of disclaimer: "Behold the expanse of *VD as VB - Erdgeist, Earth Spirit #27-29 10827*, trademarked and registered, copyrighted by me Vanessa Beecroft of the Beecroft brand and entitlement. All rights, privileges, and responsibilities therein reserved." Here the focus is on VB as a brand, her links with the fashion industry, her performances which generate sets of lucrative images (the 'official' pictures printed in large format and sold by the galleries, which are usually taken by professional photographers before the actual performance is staged), and the consequent ban on photography for the public. This is not a criticism of the art market – a market that Vaginal Davis does not belong to in any case, as she works purely on the level of performance – so much as a reflection on two relatively recent phenomena: the commercialization of performance art, and how artists become brands.

Moving from the verbal aspect to the visual one, on one hand we witness the metamorphosis of a shy white girl (VB) – angst-ridden member of the middle class and international art superstar – into an extrovert, larger than life black drag queen (VD); and on the other we can observe the conversion of the highbrow approach adopted by VB, to VD's intentionally vulgar, lowbrow style. While the models in VB53

> "We see in Beecroft's installations of nude women – and, implicitly, in much contemporary art that looks as if it is about sex – the reproduction of the repressive hypothesis (as defined by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality)*, insofar as the installations' shock value rests on the exposure of our supposedly disavowed libidinal investment in art. Davis's performances as Beecroft not only satirize this aspect of contemporary art, they in fact model an alternative means for making sex the subject of art – one not invested in uncovering sex as the ultimate truth of art but in using sex to make the social regulation of 'art' visible. Art, as understood by Davis in her citation of Beecroft, is a form of class warfare." [p. 123]
>
> **From Jennifer Doyle, *Sex Objects*, University of Minnesota Press, 2006**

VAGINAL DAVIS
VD as VB
Erdgeist, Earth Spirit
#27-29 10827

all correspond, in different ways, to the same aesthetic canons, VD's models differ in age, sex and above all appearance: portly old men and muscle-bound gym bunnies, pretty boys and girl next door types – anyone can take part in her performances. During the selection process Beecroft's models are asked to fill in a questionnaire which attempts to assess their personal, cultural and emotional suitability for the project, as well as their looks. Davis's models, on the other hand, are invited to take part in a workshop where the artist teaches them to embrace their own entirely personal, non-standard form of beauty, and create their own costumes. Davis sets a participation-based mechanism against a selection process which is final and enforced from on high. While Beecroft 'depersonalizes' her models and violates their privacy (obliging them to wear the same wig, the same costumes, paint their skin the same colour, but also on occasions to shave their pubic areas), Davis elicits a process of self-awareness ('I am beautiful') and self-determination ('I decide how to present myself and relate to the audience').

> "The sexual possibilities embedded within and contained by Beecroft's installations lend her work a gallery-sanctioned radicalism. Just as sex, as a signifier, does the work of, for instance, Jeff Koons. In this space, in which the making visible of the spectator's desires institutionally signifies art's failure to transcend the body, sex is removed from sexuality as a practice. Beecroft's work literalizes the containment of sex and the aggressive regulation of pleasure by art institutions. But Davis's appropriation of Beecroft forces the question: is this enough?" [p. 133]
>
> **From Jennifer Doyle, *Sex Objects*, University of Minnesota Press, 2006**

During the performance, Davis asks her performers to repeat a number of phrases along with her: "I am beautiful... I am desiderable... My breastage creates want... I have perfect genitalia." In the light of what we have said, these phrases can be interpreted as a criticism of Beecroft's work, which is accused of commercializing the body, manipulating desire, using sex in a hypocritical way and paying tribute, as Doyle says, 'to the most regressive impulses in art', and they can also be seen as the result of the work on the participants' self-esteem – I do not comply to a norm, yet I am still beautiful and desirable. Davis also systematically upends the rules that Beecroft's models have to obey: "Tonight I present a living breathing sculpture, the embodiment of all that is pure, new and transcendent. Drink them in, swallow them, look, look, and look some more, photograph, videotape and document for the king and his kingdom. But you can only touch if you ask them nicely, and they approve."
The models and the audience do not have to comply with any rules, but can decide what they want to do. In this way, something paradoxical occurs: even when VD pushes back the boundaries of decency, both verbally and visually (like in her 2000 performance, where a marine, after stripping, attempts to get an erection), her performances seem much more equable, and on the whole, less uncomfortable than VB's. This is because in VD's works the body is not a mere object for contemplation, but an opportunity for dialogue, and also because instead of the intentionally cold,

fascistoid settings chosen by VB we have the louche, freer approach of the underground scene.

At this point, in the light of what we have seen, it can be useful to return to the previously mentioned concept of 'moral ambiguity'. In her work Beecroft creates a mechanism for repressing natural urges and standardizing the body and aesthetic tastes, and she does this without passing judgement. Her work is seductive yet unsettling: it appears to want to make us reflect on an issue, but it acts with the complicity and active support of the system which is the root of the problem. It is both statement and negation. It tackles something obscure, but does not combat it, seemingly more interested in getting us to reflect on the reasons behind its success. Why are models still dying of anorexia? Why are car adverts still presenting us with these visions of Aryan-looking, glamorous, aggressively sexual, inaccessible women? Why does the image of the soldier continue to function as a symbol of power and masculinity? Beecroft does not critique these models, but exposes us – with a force never acheived by advertising – to their power of seduction.

"By injecting art's institutional force into the spectacle of queer sex (same sex, as well as drunken, casual, and nonejaculatory), the piece raised questions about the line between sex and art – but from a different angle than that described by the exemplary figures in gay studies in art history (like Robert Mapplethorpe). Davis's work does not disturb the boundary between art and sex by making art that is overtly sexual or that formally anticipates its own censorship (as Richard Meyer theorizes a tradirion of expression of homosexuality in twentieth-century art making). More nearly, Davis troubles the art-sex distinction by invoking high-art traditions in the most inappropriate spaces (rather than inappropriate acts in high-art spaces), by reminding us that a bohemian life is about sexual possibility as well as style and innovation." [p. 139]

From Jennifer Doyle, *Sex Objects*, University of Minnesota Press, 2006

As for Vaginal Davis, she manipulates much more direct expressive codes, such as homosexual exhibitionism, the extroverted nature of the gay world, but also cultural guerilla action and political activism. This puts her in the position to understand the pernicious nature of Beecroft's work (and the same goes for Koons, Richard Prince and many other artists, from Warhol onwards): by veiling criticism in the language of power, and presenting it in a way that pleases the system, Beecroft (like Warhol, like Koons) produces works that may be more mature and lasting from the artistic point of view, but are useless, even counterproductive, when it comes to cultural guerrilla action. The difference between the work of VB and VD could be likened to the difference between Pop Art (critical? conservative? the jury is still out), and situationist art, which is without a doubt critical. This is why the target of the détournement is Beecroft, rather than just any kind of image from the world of advertising. Davis uses Beecroft's performances as a Trojan horse to attack the institutions of the art world, and through them, the mainstream: the image of reactionary political power, aesthetic conservatism, which is culturally white and sexually hypocritical.

Vaginal Davis
The Madonna of Laibachdorf
Alkatraz gallery, Ljubljana, 2007
Photo session
Photo: Nada Žgank / Memento
Courtesy: Aksioma

This approach returns to great effect in *The Madonna of Laibachdorf* (2007), the image produced during Davis's stay in Ljubljana, as a response to Beecroft's *White Madonna with twins* (2006). The latter is part of a series of works which came out of a trip to Sudan in November 2005. In this war-torn country, Beecroft – the guest of a Catholic mission – created a number of sacred shots, including this one, which shows her as an ethereal presence clad in the wonderful dress created for the occasion by the designer Martin Margiela, breastfeeding two African children. The children were Sudanese twins whose mother had died, and who were actually breastfed by the artist during her stay (she had recently given birth to her second child). There is no need to say that the image – like the others in that series – is a masterpiece of ambiguity. Springing from her desire to report her encounter with History, but also the contradictions of the humanitarian effort, these images feature a striking contrast between content and form, which is formal to the point of kitsch: the models (all Sudanese apart from the artist) are beautiful, the clothes they wear simple but elegant, the photography as cold and impeccable as ever, and the Christian iconography is presented in a mawkish, scholastic way. The moving gesture of breastfeeding two orphaned children sits awkwardly with the Margiela dress. In an interview the artist declared: 'Yes, it is an ambivalent image – everyone is either very happy or very angry'. [5]

In *The Madonna of Laibachdorf*, Davis, clad in a white dress, holds two white children. She is not breastfeeding them, but gazes at them maternally, an absurd expression on the face of a drag queen. While the image of Beecroft was taken in a difficult situation, *The Madonna of Laibachdorf* is the result of a fun session, which involved not only the babies but also their respective mothers. Once more, Davis, rather than attempting to re-enact the project faithfully, appropriates the figure and her hallmark style to develop an entirely independent discourse of her own. While Beecroft's Madonna is the symbol – successful or otherwise, this is of little importance - of our troubled relationship with the southern hemisphere, Davis' Madonna is an emblem of our atavic fear of diversity, be it racial or sexual. By breastfeeding the Sudanese twins, the wealthy white woman attempts a gesture of charity, but actually perpetrates an act of colonialism, while by cradling two chubby white babies, the black homosexual reveals the hypocrisy that lies under the thin veneer of tolerance, brandishing diversity like a threat. A genial threat, because the fear lies not in Davis, but in the eyes of the spectator.

notes

[1] Vaginal Davis, quoted in Jennifer Doyle, *Sex Objects*, University of Minnesota Press, 2006, p. 121.
[2] Ibid, pp. 121-122.
[3] See the catalogue AAVV, *VB53 Vanessa Beecroft*, Charta, Milan 2005.
[4] The complete text: "VD as VB, VD as VB, VD as VB / Valid art today is polarized into an unassuaged and inconsolable expressivity that rejects every last trace of conciliation, and becomes autonomous construction; and, the expressionlessness of construction that expresses the dawning powerlessness of expression. / VD as VB, VD as VB, VD as VB / The discussion of the taboo that weighs on subject and expression touches on a dialectic of maturity. / VD as VB, VD as VB, VD as VB."
[5] Neville Wakefield, "Progetto Sudan. Invocazione alla Madonna Bianca", in *Flash Art*, n° 260, October-November 2006, pp. 87-90.

Action #5

www.reakt.org/triglav

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav

"The more we are, the faster we will reach the goal!" [1]

— Janez Janša

One of the most interesting aspects of re-enactment, in whatever form, is its capacity to interfere with, or rather to become an active part of the history of a symbol, event, social construct, or work of art. Re-enactment arises when a symbol (or event, etc.) evolves, and the re-enactment ends up conditioning that evolution in one way or another. Alongside the many possible definitions of re-enactment it might be worth including another: re-enactment as a tool for the construction, and why not, the manipulation of memory. This prerogative of re-enactment emerges explicitly in the Triglav cycle.
To understand this series of works, created in different periods by different artists, we should distinguish between two different levels right from the start: the history of the symbol in the context of the collective perception and memory of a population; and the history of repeated attempts to appropriate this symbol, against the background of an artistic history as particular as that of Slovenia.

The symbol in question is Mount Triglav, which, standing at 2,864 metres, is the highest mountain in Slovenia and the Julian Alps. The name ("tri", three and "glave", heads) would appear to derive from its characteristic three-pointed shape, though some link it to a three-headed divinity from Slavic mythology. Traditionally the mountain is one of the symbols of Slovenia, though it took some time to become an official icon. Mentioned in one of the most popular patriotic songs (*Oj, Triglav, moj dom* by Jakob Aljaž), Triglav only appeared on the Slovenian flag in 1991 [2], in place of the red socialist star, when the country left the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It did, however, appear in military insignia as of the post war period. Around 2003 the design of the flag, too similar to the Slovakian flag, was called into question; nothing was done, but it is significant that the winning sketch was based entirely on the stylized outline of the mountain. In January 2007, Mount Triglav put in an appearance on Slovenia's 50 euro cents coin.

Mount Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain, the constellation of cancer and the inscription "Oj Triglav Moj Dom" (O Triglav, my home) feature on the 50 cent coin.

We are therefore dealing with a national symbol, but that of a nation whose recent history is considerably tormented.

One of the first provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to have its flag recognized, after the First World War Slovenia became part of the newly-formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. During the Second World War parts of the country were variously occupied by Italy, Germany and Hungary, then in the post-war period

OHO
Milenko Matanović, David Nez, Drago Dellabernardina
Mount Triglav

Zvezda Park, Ljubljana, 30.12.1968
Courtesy: Moderna galerija, Ljubljana

it became part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. On 25 June 1991 Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia, obtaining it after a brief conflict known as the "Ten-Day War". The stability it subsequently achieved, both politically and economically, led to it being the first Balkan nation to enter the European Union, in 2004.

On 30 December 1968, at the Zvezda Park in Ljubljana, three members of the group OHO (Milenko Matanović, David Nez, and Drago Dellabernardina) donned a heavy black sheet which reached down to their feet, leaving only their faces visible. The performance – in actual fact little more than a tableau-vivant – was entitled *Mount Triglav*. The newly-founded group was set to become one of the most interesting players in the brief season of the Slovenian artistic neo-avantgarde. Having started life with an open artistic identity, as an interdisciplinary context hosting different practices, in 1969 OHO set about forming a genuine artistic collective, working on the confines between conceptual art, performance and process art. An anti-art stance soon began to predominate, and between 1970 and 1971 OHO evolved into a kind of hippy commune, in an attempt to take the fusion of art and life to extremes. The OHO story is emblematic of a very particular phase in Slovenian art, in which protests against the art market and the work of art as object, and the anarchist, libertarian stance of the international neo-avantgarde movements, were expressed in a particularly extreme way, something that enabled the art scene in Slovenia, unlike in other contexts, to avoid being integrated into the system. *Mount Triglav* is emblematic of this attitude: OHO takes on the task of "embodying" a national symbol, at a time in which the nation's dream of self-determination appears painfully subjugated to a utopia under threat. And even though the long hippy hair of the performers does introduce a note of

parody, the members of OHO are careful not to give their performance any specific ideological connotations. *Mount Triglav* still appears as impenetrable as the rock face of the symbol it incarnates. As Katie Kitamura writes, "OHO's performance seemed both to inhabit the national symbol and to claim it for itself, replacing the anonymous peaks of the mountain with the faces of 1960s' counterculture." [3] Beyond other more historic connotations, like their conceptual aptitude for working with language, as noted by Miško Suvaković [4], and the "objectification of the human", highlighted by Kitamura [5], what strikes us about this work, and justifies the subsequent re-enactments, is the deconstruction and reconstruction of the symbol. The performance interferes with a symbol, and creates another: the tiny blurred photos of the event are an emblem of performance art in the sixties and seventies – more interested in the process than the object – and in the construction of an event more than its duration over time; they are also artistic fetish objects. Precisely in view of their neglected, anti-aesthetic feel and non-mediated character, these objects are ideal witnesses to the authenticity of an event that, at a distance, has acquired an almost sacred status. These images, like many others which document early performances, are like the relics of saints: their aura is not self-made, but acquired, independently of the intentions of those who produced them.

This latter aspect is decisive for the comprehension of *Like to Like* (2003-2004), a project by the group Irwin, which takes the form of six large format prints of some of the historic works by OHO, including Mount Triglav. On one level, the entire operation can be interpreted as a reflection on performance art and its ability to give rise to iconic images. In *Like to Like*, Irwin appropriates some projects (performance art, but also installations, environmental art, etc.), and transforms them into images. The performance aspect of the various projects is lost, and what is highlighted is their ability to give rise to images that lodge in the memory, both individually and collectively, withstanding the test of time, becoming part of history and manipulating an identity. The painstaking philology with which Irwin stages the OHO performance is at odds with its betrayal of the initial premise of the original work: performance as bringing an end to the artistic object. This basically means two things: on one hand Irwin operates in an entirely different artistic context, where performance art exists in virtue of the media it generates; while on the other hand, the group is performing an operation of historiography. This operation resembles that implemented, in a different way, in *East Art Map*, the volume that reconstructs "the missing history of contemporary art, art networks, and art conditions in Eastern Europe from the East European perspective" [6]: in *Like to Like* Irwin manipulates memory, and writes the history of Slovenian art.
To quote the statement that introduces the "texts" section of their website: "There is Greek art; there is German art and there is French art. But there is no art as such. The more Slovene our art is, the better. "
At this point we should consider the artistic intentions of the Irwin group. Founded in 1984, Irwin represents the "visual arts" division of the Neue Slowenische Kunst, an

Irwin
Like to Like / Mount Triglav
Photographic reconstruction of the OHO group action Mount Triglav

Zvezda Park, Ljubljana, 2004
A Cornerhouse Commision
Photo: Tomaž Gregorič
Courtesy: Galerija Gregor Podnar

ambitious collective project that consists in reliving the trauma experienced by the avant-garde movements when they witnessed totalitarian regimes appropriating their utopian impetus. As Eda Kufer and Irwin write: "Retro avant-garde is the basic artistic procedure of Neue Slowenische Kunst, based on the premise that traumas from the past affecting the present and the future can be healed only by returning to the initial conflicts. Modern art has not yet overcome the conflict brought about by the rapid and efficient assimilation of historical avant-garde movements in the systems of totalitarian states." [7] In other words, NSK could be described as the most colossal re-enactment in the history of contemporary art: that of the avant-garde and its trauma.

In Irwin's artistic programme, this concept is declined into three main principles: the "retro-principle", based on decoding and re-coding the art of the past; emphatic eclecticism, and asserting the Slovenian nationality and national culture [8]. This can be seen, for example, in their famous *Icons*, paintings that use collage to mingle avant-garde art with totalitarian propaganda, sacred iconography and the formal characteristics of tradition. The symbols of totalitarian power are demolished not through criticism or parody, but by means of a much more subtle process of over-identification, also termed "subversive affirmation" [9]. The ideology of the NSK oeuvre is not explicitly stated, and this very semantic ambiguity was its strong point in the eighties and nineties. Avant-garde art is not challenged or glorified: it is rewritten. Nowadays, after the collapse of the totalitarian regimes, and in a context that Vladimir

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav

Mount Triglav, 2007
Performance
Photo: Gaja Repe
Courtesy: Aksioma

P. Štefanec, playing with the language of government propaganda, has dubbed "relaxed capitalism" [10], it is not clear whether the avant-garde trauma has been overcome or not. One thing for sure is that Irwin has become a definitive point of reference for the new generation of artists, Slovenian and otherwise; and that the relationship between art and the political establishment is a lot more ambiguous and stratified than it was in the days of the avant-garde movements.

In this context Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša appear. On 6 August 2007 they staged a performance entitled *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav*, which provisionally closes this matrioska-style story initiated by OHO in 1968. Slovenia has found itself a place in the new world order, and Mount Triglav has survived the transition intact, taking pride of place on one of the coins that symbolizes the victory of capitalism. In recent years cracks have begun to show in the latter, but capitalist democracy seems to be the only available model, the model which countries recovering from the collapse of the great narrations attempt to evolve towards. The powers that be have developed such a strong resistance to criticism, that not only parody, but also over-identification, appear weak strategies. When they staged *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav*, the three Janšas had just completed a long bureaucratic procedure enabling them all to take the same name: a name that also happened to belong to the then Prime Minister of Slovenia. While the three artists have always attempted not to reduce this operation to its purely political significance, claiming "personal reasons" for the

change of identity, it becomes very difficult to exclude the political element when we see *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav*. When "Janez Janša" tackles the ascent of Mount Triglav (a sort of rite for Slovenians, something like Muslims going to Mecca) to re-stage the work of a hippy collective in the sixties, they create a kind of short circuit that nothing and no-one seems to come out of unscathed. With Janez Janša we are beyond over-identification as a performance strategy and resistance tactic; what we have here is an oblique attack which functions by annihilating the identity of the symbol: this affirms on one hand the power of the symbol itself, and on the other our resistance to its magnetism.
Davide Grassi, Ziga Karič and Emil Hrvatin have cancelled themselves out to become Janez Janša, a living, transitory symbol of political power; and Janez Janša nullifies himself in Triglav, the eternal symbol of a nation. The work on the name of the mountain continues, and the "three heads" of OHO become one: that of Janez Janša, which is both single and trinity. This does not however imply that each renounces his own artistic [11] and national individuality. Like the three members of OHO who staged the original performance, the three Janezs are of different nationalities. In *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav*, this fact is ironically underlined by the position of the three heads and the direction of their gazes: the artist formerly known as Davide Grassi looks towards Italy, and the Croat Hrvatin towards Croatia, while the Slovenian Janez appears to look generally around.

The troubled relationship with a symbol that stands the test of time thanks to a series of adaptations and variations, which at times are imperceptible, is evident in the numerous anniversaries that occasion the performance, according to the statement given by the three Janšas: "Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša performed the action entitled *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav*, in order to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the death of Jakob Aljaž; the 33rd anniversary of the Footpath from Vrhnika to Mount Triglav; the 5th anniversary of the Footpath from the Wörthersee Lake across Mount Triglav to the Bohinj Lake; the 25th anniversary of the publication of Nova Revija magazine and the 20th anniversary of the 57th issue of Nova Revija, the premiere publication of the Slovenian Spring; and the 16th anniversary of the independent state of Slovenia."
It would almost appear that Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša are celebrating a country full of anniversaries yet without an identity, unable to comprehend the meaning of its own festivities. Yet, like in the two previous cases, the ambiguity persists: are we sure they are striking a blow to the symbolic meaning of Mount Triglav, or are they actually trying to rid it of all its accumulated dross in an attempt to restore its original identity? As for formal strategies, it is significant that Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša, who asked Irwin to loan them the canvas used three years previously in *Like to Like*, abandon the vertical format used by both OHO and Irwin, which was clearly inspired by the stylized outline of the mountain (as it appears on the flag and coat of arms). They chose to adopt a horizontal angle, which is less recognizable but more similar to the real shape of the mountain. Here once again there appears to be an attempt to return to the

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Monument to the National Contemporary Art (Golden Triglav)

Steirischer Herbst, Forum Stadtpark, Graz, 2008
Installation
Photo: Peter Rauch
Courtesy: Aksioma

origins, aware of all the symbolic encrustations, but at the same time determined to do away with them. Triglav, the national symbol of Slovenia, which thanks to OHO and Irwin, has also become an emblem of Slovenian art, has completed its process of monumentalization: from object to symbol, from symbol to reinterpreted, subverted icon, to image, to monument. In the golden sculpture entitled *Monument to the National Contemporary Art (Golden Triglav)* created by Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša, the mountain is once more an object, not merely a linguistic construct. In Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav, the symbols explode due to their very accumulation. But what emerges at the end, under all the layers, is not a meaningless fetish object, but the hard rock of the mountain.

notes

[1] Janez Janša, the president of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), ends his letter to every new member of his party with this uplifting sentence.
[2] On this occasion, the symbol on the flag was redesigned by Marko Pogačnik, none other than a member of the OHO group: a curious intersection between the collective history and artistic history of the symbol, which acquires further meaning in the light of what follows.
[3] Katie Kitamura, "Triglav", in *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 113, March 2008.
[4] "The artistic work, which models a mountain, showed the relationship between 'mountain as material' and 'name as label'. Three real human hippie heads were similar to the three peaks of the mountain." In Miško Suvaković, "3 x Triglav: controversies and problems regarding Mount Triglav", in Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša (eds), *NAME Readymade*, Moderna galerija / Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana 2008, p. 70.
[5] Katie Kitamura, quoted.
[6] Irwin (eds), *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, Afterall Books 2006.
[7] Eda Čufer & Irwin, "NSK State in Time", 1993. Available online at http://www.nskstate.com/irwin/texts/nsk-state-in-time.php
[8] From "The Program of Irwin Group", April 1984, http://www.nskstate.com/irwin/texts/irwin-pro-uk.php.
[9] In this regard see the special edition of the journal Maska edited by Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse (*Maska*, vol. XXI, n° 98-99, Spring 2006).
[10] Vladimir P. Štefanec, "Evolucija motiva", in DELO, October 20, 2007. Štefanec uses the word "sproščen" which means "relaxed": a key term in the right-wing political propaganda used by Janša to emphasize how idyllic, easy and tension-free everything is.
[11] For an analysis of the continuity between the work of the three artists before their name change, and their work as Janez Janša, see Zdenka Badovinac, "What is the importance of being Janez?", in Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša (eds), *NAME Readymade*, Moderna galerija / Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana 2008, pp. 51-65.

Action #6

www.reakt.org/sng

Janez Janša
Slovene National Theatre

"Are you human?"

– Janez Drnovšek
President of the Republic of Slovenia
at the time, Ambrus, 2006

Janez Drnovšek, President of the Republic of Slovenia at the time (upper frame, right) and police forces, Ambrus, 2006
Courtesy: RTV Slovenija

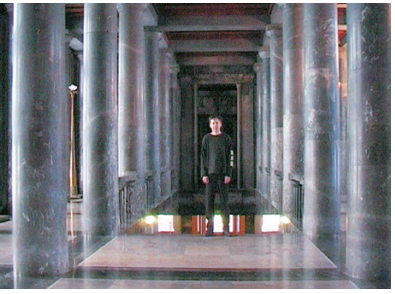
On 28 October 2006 the Strojans, a family of 31 (including 14 children) were forced to leave the Slovenian village of Ambrus under police escort, and taken to a refugee centre in Postojna, 30 miles away. They had been under siege for two days, trapped by a crowd of fellow townspeople who were demanding they leave the town, under threat of death.
The Strojans were not a popular family in the village. Their neighbours accused them of illegal appropriation of land, and dumping rubbish in a nearby waterway. The situation had come to a head a few days previously, when there was a fight and a local man ended up in hospital, in a coma. But it was not a normal grievance between neighbours, by any means.
The Strojans are "tzigani", to use the local word, gypsies.
The disturbing story of the family soon became a political case which brought forth the xenophobia of an entire nation, which until then had been viewed as a haven of peace and prosperity in the troubled Balkans.
"Kill the Gypsies!", "We'll string you up on a cross!", "Gypsies raus!" [1] were just some of the shouts from the crowd that formed around the house. At 6 pm the Slovenian Home Secretary arrived, intervening decisively to ensure the "relocation" – a euphemism for deportation? – of the Strojans to Postojna, with the promise of a new house in three weeks. The situation calmed down.
"We have nothing against them. We just think they should be found somewhere else to live" [2], declared the mayor of Ambrus to a reporter from the *International Herald Tribune*, while the Education Minister commented, "I think the standard of living is far better in Postojna", evidently not understanding what it might mean to live in a house for 60 years and then be forcibly removed from it. But when the human rights ombudsman Matjaž Hanžek observed that the members of the government didn't even realise they were using discriminatory language, the prime minister Janez Janša accused him of denigrating Slovenia [3].
The Strojans never got their new house. On Christmas Day 2006, grandmother Elka, the oldest member of the family, left Postojna in secret with some of the children and tried to return home. As soon as the people of Ambrus got wind of this, they gathered once

Janez Janša
Slovene National Theatre
2007
Digital video
Courtesy: Maska

more, and the government had the brilliant idea of sending in bulldozers to demolish various buildings that the Strojans had built illegally on their land. At this point the Slovenian president Janez Drnovšek got involved. Known for opposing the policies of the prime minister, Drnovšek tried to help grandma Elka, provoking a furore among the townspeople, who stopped him in the street to tell him to go back to where he had come from.
The months following the "Ambrus incident" saw an increase in episodes of racism, directed especially at the Tzigane community. The xenophobic right increased its power in the 2004 elections. But the most disturbing part of the whole episode was the fact that the aggressive language used by the people of Ambrus, together with the "discriminatory speech" described by Hanžek was – as Blaž Lukan observed – legitimized by the political élite, who took it on and thus normalized it.

It is this very language that the *Slovene National Theatre* [4] invites us to think about: its harshness, but above all its ambiguities; its open, aggressive racism, with the spectre that conjures up, but above all its latent racism, anaesthetized by political euphemisms. *Slovene National Theatre* (Slovensko narodno gledališče or *SNG*) is a theatrical piece that works on two levels. On the stage there are four actors standing in a row side by side. Wearing headphones, they mechanically repeat what they hear: the declarations made by the mayor of Ambrus, the president Janez Drnovšek and other political figures; the shouts of the crowd and the utterances of others involved in the incident - the members of the Strojan family, police officers, journalists. Fragments of the media storm that blew up around the episode are repeated in the neutral, detached style of the actors of *SNG*. At the back of the stage are five giant plasma screens playing videos in which, against a background of five places that symbolise the ostracism of the Tzigane gypsies, Janez Janša (the artist behind the show, not the prime minister) obsessively repeats the mantra "Tziganes... Tziganes... Tziganes" [5].
The radical nature of Janez Janša's approach makes the performance interesting for a number of reasons. In the first place the original event is not represented, as you

would expect with a piece of theatre, or reconstructed, as you would expect with a re-enactment. The only thing about the Ambrus episode that is presented, with total fidelity [6], is the linguistic aspect, as it was conveyed in the media. But the form that this "re-invoicement" takes, with the actors mechanically repeating what they hear in their headphones, strips the original media documentation of any vestige of drama. Or rather, it strips the word of the rhetoric and anaesthetizing slant of the media, and offers it to the spectator bare, without inflection, and as a result, laden with a different kind of drama. At the same time, by detaching these utterances from the media and lending them the immediacy of a live experience, having them spoken by people right there in front of us, Janez Janša brings these words out of oblivion and consigns them to memory. As Blaž Lukan writes: "Much more important is the fact that Janša with this reconstruction and transcription of the documentary material brought back to life a fact, which our political (and media) reality already left behind and forgot about.



Trying to keep the memory of the Ambrus case alive and protecting it from the (partly dictated and partly spontaneous) amnesia of political and media reality, is the essential quality of this piece." [7]

Secondly, on a more formal level, we have the acute contrast between a highly 'mediatized' version of reality – represented on stage by the videos and headphones – and the evocation of a theatrical topos – the historic tradition of the chorus commenting on and accompanying the action. In actual fact, Janša's chorus does not comment on the action, but is the repository that contains it: it places the audience before the bare facts, and instead of imposing a particular vision, elicits the audience to form their own point of view and value judgement.

In other words *SNG* works with the ambiguous relationship between media and reality in a highly mediatized society. Quoting Philip Auslander, Tomaž Toporišič writes: "whereas mediatized performance derives its authority from its reference to the live or the real, the live now derives its authority from its reference to the mediatized, which derives its authority from its reference to the live, etc." [8]

These dynamics emerge to the letter in *SNG*. Its point of departure is a traumatic event

Janez Janša
Slovene National Theatre

Stara Elektrarna, Ljubljana, 2007
Performance
Photo: Marcandrea
Courtesy: Maska

which reveals the tensions in an apparently peaceful, calm society: an event that is metabolized, digested and expelled without a solution ever being reached, precisely thanks to its ample media presence, leaving evident traces in the language of that society. The media, the principal force behind the episode's fall into oblivion, is also the main repository of its history, and by recovering the media flow and stripping it of its transitory character, Janša succeeds in rediscovering and restoring the original events, in their full impact.

notes

[1] Nicholas Wood, "Hounding of Gypsies Contradicts Slovenia's Image", in *The New York Times*, November 13, 2006. Available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/13/world/europe/13slovenia.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

[2] Nicholas Wood, "Roma family's forced move raises rights issue in Slovenia", in *International Herald Tribune*, November 7, 2006. Available online at http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/11/07/news/gypsy.php?page=1

[3] Nicholas Wood, "Hounding of Gypsies Contradicts Slovenia's Image", quoted.

[4] *Slovene National Theatre* is the name of Slovenia's most prestigious theatre company, but as we will see in this paragraph, the use of the name here is linked to the desire to highlight how the "Ambrus case" brings forth some of the salient characteristics of modern-day Slovenia.

[5] The five places are: the Holocaust Monument in Berlin, Mount Triglav, the Jože Pučnik airport in Ljubljana, a university library and a Catholic church.

[6] As the introduction to SNG explains: "All characters are real people with the same names and titles or functions and all have actually said what is written here. No words have been added, appropriated or changed. The text has not been (grammatically) proofread..."

[7] Blaž Lukan, "Janša in Ambrus", originally published as "Janša v Ambrusu", in *Delo*, 2 November 2007.

[8] Tomaž Toporišič, "The Political at the Intersection of the Live and the Mediatized", in *Maska*, vol. XXIII, no. 113-114, Spring 2008, pp. 51-55.

Action #7

Eva and Franco Mattes aka 0100101110101101.ORG

Reenactment of Marina Abramović and Ulay's 'IMPONDERABILIA'

"Eva and me, we hate performance art, we never quite got the point. So, we wanted to understand what made it so un-interesting to us, and reenacting these performances was the best way to figure it out." [1]

— Eva and Franco Mattes

Marina Abramović / Ulay
Imponderabilia
Galleria d'Arte Civica di Bologna, Bologna, 1977
Performance
Courtesy: Marina Abramović

The advent of re-enactment, of both historical events and artistic performances of the past, has gone hand in hand with the renewed success of performance art as of the 90s, to the point where it is now interpreted as one of the signs of this success. Events like *A Little Bit of History Repeated* (Berlin, Kunst-Werke 2001), *A Short History of Performance* (London, Whitechapel Art Gallery 2003), and the stir created by *7 Easy Pieces* by Marina Abramović (New York, Guggenheim Museum) and works like *The Third Memory* (1999) by Pierre Huyghe or *The Battle of Orgrave* (2002) by Jeremy Deller, would appear to support this theory.

Yet a moment's consideration of the characteristics of performance art in the 60s and 70s is enough to understand that re-enactment, rather than a sign of victory, is actually the most evident indicator of its defeat, its capitulation to the rules of the art world (which demands products) and the entertainment business (which demands repetition).

While radical stances like Marina Abramović's ("no rehearsal, no repetition, no predicted end") [2] were relatively isolated at the time, there was broad consensus over the need for authenticity (opposing the fictional nature of theatre, the eternal adversary of performance art), together with that of creating unique, unrepeatable, unpredictable events (with the immediacy of the 'here and now') which could not be reduced to the status of object or product. If this is performance art, re-enactment is its consummate nemesis.

Re-enactment takes up (repeats, reconstructs and responds to) an original event. It is based on a script, and is therefore entirely predictable, and it has a defined ending. Lastly, its dialogue with the source event, and exploration of analogies and differences respect to the original, require preparation, rehearsals and the construction of a set. Its quest for authenticity is based on a reconstruction, which brings it dangerously close to theatre, and, due to the fact that, like the performance art of the 90s, it comes into being in a completely media-dominated world, derivative products are almost inevitable; indeed in some cases re-enactment exists only in mediated form.

Action #7

Eva and Franco Mattes
(aka 0100101110101101.ORG)
Reenactment of Chris Burden's Shoot

Synthetic Performances
in Second Life, 2007
Digital video
Courtesy: Postmasters Gallery, New York

Few have acknowledged the fundamentally Oedipal nature of re-enactment with the lucidity demonstrated by Eva and Franco Mattes. Their *Synthetic Performances* (2007-2008) are a series of six re-enactments of historic performances of the 60s and 70s, staged by the artists' virtual alter-egos in the synthetic world of Second Life. As they have stated, the series arose out of their polemical stance with regard to the concept of performance art and the very works that they "pay tribute" to. This leads them on the one hand to breach the classic rules of performance art, and on the other to present these works – the efficacy of which was based on the radical way they explored the issues of the body, violence (Chris Burden), sexuality (Valie Export, Vito Acconci, Marina Abramović), identity (Gilbert & George), and the environment and public space (Joseph Beuys) – in a context where these issues acquire a completely different meaning, and as a consequence the original energy of the performance, and its power to provoke, dissipates, or turns into something completely different.

In the words of the Mattes: "We chose actions that were particularly paradoxical if performed in a virtual world." And: "everything is mediated, nothing is spontaneous. More or less the opposite of what performance art is supposed to be." [3]

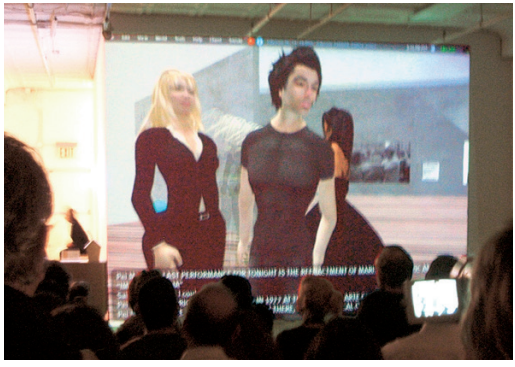
Eva and Franco Mattes
(aka 0100101110101101.ORG)
Reenactment of Valie Export and Peter Weibel's Tapp und Tastkino
Reenactment of Vito Acconci's Seedbed
Reenactment of Gilbert&George's The Singing Sculpture

Synthetic Performances in Second Life, 2007
Digital video
Courtesy: Postmasters Gallery, New York

But if the *Synthetic Performances* were merely a statement against performance art, they could be seen at the most as proving a point: simple, direct instant-works without any subtle nuances and probably not destined to last much longer than the debate that generated them. In actual fact the interesting thing about these works lies less in the mortal blow they deliver to performance art and more in the subtle way they bring it to life in a new context and lend it – if you will pardon the pun – a second life.

A virtual world is a 3D synthetic environment which the user operates in by means of a virtual alter ego, or avatar. The problems that virtual worlds pose to those not familiar with them can be summed up as follows: in a virtual world, representation and existence are one and the same thing. We no longer distinguish between the medium and life, because life is entirely mediated. I am my avatar, and the fact that my avatar is an artefact, a puppet made of polygons and textures, certainly doesn't stop me from identifying with it. When I say "I", it is my avatar talking. Obviously I can say "I" because there are millions of other "I"s with whom I can speak, dance, work, have a drink, have sex, fly around, fight, and engage in a host of other activities. If we wish, a virtual world is a consensual hallucination [A]. When we download the Second Life client and make our first access we can still cling to the belief that it is merely a piece of software, but after a few days we cannot but acknowledge the fact that it really is a world, with its own complex society, rules to obey, and rapidly evolving lifestyles. Entering a virtual world means facing up to a new possible form of existence, and the *Synthetic Performances* are first and foremost an attempt to explore this new horizon using a form of art which intrinsically focuses on life. In other words, Eva and Franco Mattes use performance art to explore "life on screen".
Let's take *Imponderabilia*, for example. In 1977, on occasion of their participation in a group show at the Galleria Civica in Bologna, Marina Abramović and her partner Ulay stood, completely naked, facing each other, in the narrow entrance to the exhibition, leaving only a restricted passageway which could be used by one person at a time, moving sideways and pressing against both of the artists' bodies. The artists themselves, immobile, appeared to be immersed in an interplay of intimacy excluding all else, while the members of the public wishing to enter or leave the exhibition area were obliged to squeeze between their naked bodies: a moment of forced physical intimacy set against a gaping emotional divide.
Re-enacting *Imponderabilia* literally implies transforming it into a script, and necessarily taking the media accounts of the event on board. Restaging it in a virtual world basically means planning everything: building the set, writing code to prevent the two actors from moving when they come into contact with another body, and writing other code to allow the spectators to squeeze easily through the narrow gap. On occasion of the New York festival Performa07, when Eva and Franco Mattes staged a live re-enactment of *Imponderabilia*, the other avatars

present had two “scripted objects” at their disposal, positioned at the edges of the set: clicking on the left hand one meant you crossed the threshold facing Franco Mattes’ naked body, while clicking on the right hand one meant you came up against Eva’s synthetic physique.
As we have said, the event was staged live, in front of two different sets of spectators: those of Second Life, who took part from the comfort of their own homes, by means of their avatars; and the audience at Performa07, who followed it “from a distance”, projected onto a wall in the presence of the artists, who were there in front of them in the flesh, albeit absorbed in their computer. The contradictions of this set-up are self-evident: the event was both live (with the unpredictable immediacy of performance art) and heavily mediated (in particular, the projection was not a fixed camera stream – there was directorial control over the way the real life spectators experienced the performance); and two levels of existence intertwined, meaning that the same event was experienced in very different ways. The real-life audience experienced the event as a show, but at the same time they were able to speak to the artists engaged in the performance. For them, the re-enactment worked on the same level as a citation: being fully conversant with the original event, they could recognize it and appreciate the differences, as the laughter and comments captured on the recording show.
The Second Life audience, on the other hand, were able to participate in the event, enrich it with new meanings, star in it and reintroduce the element of unpredictability that had been eliminated at the preparatory stage. Some avatars stripped naked before squeezing between Eva and Franco Mattes, while others, who didn’t understand the interaction mechanism, took up position in front of the door, and still others exploited the situation to give rise to new performances of their own.
As we can see, *Reenactment of Marina Abramović and Ulay’s Imponderabilia* lends itself very well to highlighting the specific contribution that the work of Eva and Franco Mattes makes to the issues involved in re-enactment.



Eva and Franco Mattes (aka 0100101110101101.ORG)
Synthetic Performances in Second Life

Artists Space,
PERFORMA07, New York, 2007
Performance
Courtesy: the artists

Action #7

Eva and Franco Mattes (aka 0100101110101101.ORG)
Reenactment of Marina Abramović and Ulay's Imponderabilia
Synthetic Performances in Second Life, 2007
Digital video
Courtesy: Postmasters Gallery, New York

The fact that a performance that revolves entirely around the unsettling sensation of intimacy created by a naked body in a public area ends up looking "paradoxical" in a virtual world does not mean that it is entirely stripped of meaning. Avatars have sex, and even though this takes place by means of improbable sexual prostheses, and the activation of sound files and a movement script, this does not mean that there are no consequences on the emotional level. Many avatars are reluctant to strip off, and those who do so in a public place are viewed as irritating troublemakers, and risk expulsion. The complete "mediatization" of the event introduces another question. While re-enactment always concerns "re-mediation", namely an appropriation or translation of other media or media objects, in a virtual world this is par for the course. But Eva and Franco Mattes go one further, taking up the documentation of the original event with philological care. No concession is made to the "vernacular" aspects of Second Life: their avatars are realistic, and the settings are reconstructed with painstaking precision; even the angles chosen by the direction faithfully reflect the photographic and filmed records of the original event. We have mentioned the term "citation", but the duo's long-standing interest in plagiarism could point to the concept of copies and originals in this context. Their *Synthetic Performances* thus represent the destiny of performance art in an age where life itself, and no longer just works of art, can be technologically reproduced. Lastly, it is important to note that in the re-enactments by Eva and Franco Mattes, the conceptual hub of the work is spatial rather than temporal. As Jennifer Allen writes, re-enactment is to do with time: "Reenactment depends upon a linear construction of time. Of course, the 're' denotes a return to an earlier time, the existence of an event that has expired and therefore can be safely enacted once again, without being confused with itself." [5] And Inke Arns notes, "Events [...] are re-enacted that are viewed as very important for the present. Here the reference to the past is not history for history's sake; it is about the relevance of what happened in the past for the here and now." [6]

The *Synthetic Performances* also implement this kind of examination, but rather than effecting a temporal shift, they work in terms of space, transporting an event into another context, another medium. The aim remains the comprehension of the here and now, but it is the here rather than the now which is challenged.

notes

[1] Eva and Franco Mattes, "Nothing is real, everything is possible. Excerpts from interviews with Eva and Franco Mattes aka 0100101110101101.ORG", 2007. Available online at http://www.0100101110101101.org/home/performances/interview.html

[2] From a statement of 1976, presented in AAVV, *Marina Abramović*. 7 Easy Pieces, Charta, Milan 2007.

[3] Eva and Franco Mattes, "Nothing is real, everything is possible...", quoted.

[4] William Gibson's uber definition of cyberspace in the novel *Neuromancer* (1984): "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts..."

[5] Jennifer Allen, "'Einmal ist keinmal'. Observations on Reenactment", in Sven Lütticken (ed.), *Life, Once More. Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, exhibition catalogue, Witte de With, Rotterdam 2005, pp. 177-213.

[6] Inke Arns, "History Will Repeat Itself", in Inke Arns, Gabriele Horn (eds), *History Will Repeat Itself. Strategies of re-enactment in contemporary (media) art and performance*, exhibition catalogue, Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2007.

Action #8

www.reakt.org/ssxxx

Janez Janša
SS-XXX | Die Frau Helga. The Borghild Project Reconstruction

"If it happened only once it's as if it never happened."

— Arthur Zmijewski

German soldiers in the early 1940s.

In his essay *History Will Repeat Itself*, Inke Arns asserts that our increasingly mediated experience of the world is one of the reasons for the recent success of re-enactment. In the words of Arns, "History appears to be present at all the times and in all places; at the same time, however, this permanent availability of media representation renders all forms of authenticity increasingly remote." [1] This leads to the need to 'update' events – be they historic or recent – that exist only in mediated form.

Arns describes this as a transition "from representation to embodiment" [2], and observes that it is based on an unresolved contradiction: on one hand it eliminates the distance between us and the images, while on the other it distances itself from the mediated image; it removes the filter of the media (and of time) in an attempt to recover the original dimension.

To quote Steve Rushton [3], all re-enactment (or, more generally, all practices of reconstruction) is connected to the "mediation of memory", an expression which beautifully encapsulates both the mediatory role of memory and the impact of the media on it.

The relationship between these four poles (the event, its reconstruction, media and memory) becomes even more complicated if we take account of various other factors which are by no means secondary. In the first place it is significant that all reconstructions, including those more strictly related to performance art, make considerable use of the media, not only in the (posthumous) stage of circulation in the artistic circuit, but also at the stage of what Arns would call the embodiment. This can be seen in a few examples which have become classics, from *The Battle of Orgreave* by Jeremy Deller to *The Third Memory* by Pierre Huyghe, to *Auditions for a Revolution* by Irina Botea. In other words, even the embodiment, as it occurs, becomes a representation. Secondly, in their works many artists seem more interested in underlining how the mediation brings the original work 'up to date', than rediscovering an alleged "original event". This is also in view of the fact that the latter exists only in virtue of the traces it has left – written, iconographic and material traces.

As historians and lawyers well know, the distinction between actual and probable is extremely subtle, and, as *The Third Memory* demonstrates so well, if even the protagonist of an event, when reconstructing that event, cannot help looking to the way it has been reconstructed by others, we can safely say that it is all but impossible to bypass the media, and the mediatory role of memory.
In line with this concept, some artists have tried to break free from the bonds that tie reconstructions to the past. In this case "reconstructing" does not mean recouping an original event in the present, but "building again" on the fragile foundations offered by memory – gathering its media fortune and actively contributing to it, combining actual and probable, historiography and imagination, truth and interpretation. These reconstructions do not rely on any sense of loyalty to the past, because they are aware that the past comes to us irremediably manipulated; rather, they attempt to explore our faith in the 'proof' offered by objects and the media image.
Greenwich Degree Zero (2006), by Rod Dickinson and Tom McCarthy, is perhaps the most emblematic example of this. The artists reconstructed an event that never occurred (the fire in *Greenwich Observatory* that would have resulted from an unsuccessful arson attack by an anarchist in 1894), creating fake but probable documentation of the event. The term re-enactment is deceptive: Greenwich Degree Zero is an example of media falsification. It does not reconstruct the past, but intends to demonstrate how malleable it is.

SS-XXX | Die Frau Helga. The Borghild Project Reconstruction (2007) is on the same wavelength. The work started life as a news item, which did the rounds in 2005, and was reported on as authentic by various esteemed newspapers, from the Argentinian *Clarín* to the German *Der Spiegel* to the Italian *Corriere della Sera*.
The story, which appeared on the German site borghild.de [4], with many details, (most of) which can be verified, regards the work carried out by a team of Nazi scientists, from 1941 onwards, on the creation of the first sex doll in human history. This was designed to satisfy the comprehensible sexual urges of German soldiers at war, while avoiding the unpleasant health risks connected to frequenting brothels. It quickly transpired that the story was a hoax, artfully created by a (still anonymous) author.
In particular it was noted that Norbert Lenz, the name behind the borghild.de site, described as "a freelance-journalist contributing regularly to magazines like *Stern*, *Max* and *Focus*" appeared to be entirely unknown to the editorial staff of the magazines in question, and while much of the circumstantial evidence can be easily verified, some of the main characters involved appear to be unknown to history, and the documents mentioned impossible to trace. Yet all of this merely shed doubt on the *Borghild Project*: while there is no proof in its favour, we also lack the proof that it is definitely a hoax. Whatever the truth of the matter, the *Borghild Project* is

one of history's black holes. It continues to live on, above all on the net, and while some are hard at work to debunk it, others are working equally hard to enrich it with new details. As Einstein said, theory determines what we observe, in history as well as science, and the theory at the basis of the *Borghild Project* is a most interesting one indeed. In one project it offers the chance to explore the probative power of a media fragment; the scientific and technological innovations developed by the Third Reich, and some significant ideological implications regarding the theory of racial purity.

20 November 1940 [5]: in a letter, Heinrich Himmler, commander of the SS, observes the "unnecessary losses" among his troops caused by the prostitutes of Paris. Out of the search for a solution to this problem comes *Borghild*, a top secret project under the responsibility of Himmler himself. The project was developed as of 1941 at the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum in Dresden, under the supervision of Franz Tschackert, an engineer who rose to fame in 1935, for his *Woman of Glass*. The latter – a suggestive glass mannequin which reveals the skeleton and blood vessels – was exhibited for the first time at the exhibition *The Miracle of Life*, which

Nazi officials at the The Miracle of Life exhibition German Hygiene Museum, Dresden, 1935

The new Nazi museum leadership asserted that societies resembled organisms that followed the lead of their brains. The most logical social structure was one that saw society as a collective unit, literally a body guided by a strong leader.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Courtesy: National Archives and Records Administration.

Janez Janša
SS-XXX | Die Frau Helga, the Borghild Project Reconstruction
Galerija Nova, Zagreb, 2007
Installation
Photo: Kresimir Tubikanec
Courtesy: Aksioma

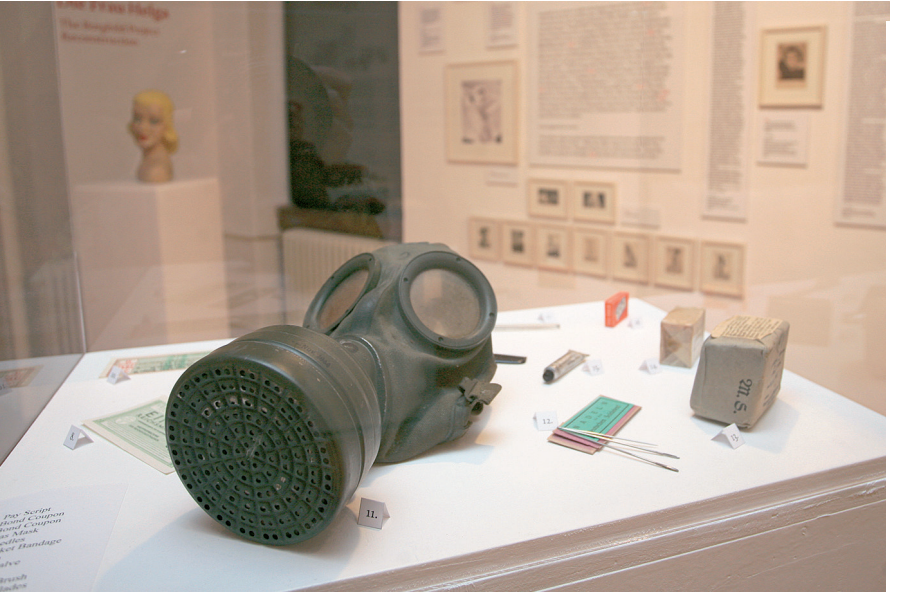
was organised by the museum with the patronage of the Nazis. The sex doll dreamt up by Himmler, destined to follow the troops into enemy terrain, presented some additional challenges, as noted by Rudolf Chargeheimer, a psychiatrist involved in the project. In order to be preferable to a real woman, the doll had to fulfill certain quality standards: her synthetic flesh had to be very similar to real flesh; her body as flexible as a real one; her sexual organs were to seem entirely realistic, and above all, her appearance had to correspond to the soldiers' expectations.

The German chemical industry had already proved its ability to produce high quality skin-like polymers, so the labs set about working on the doll's appearance. Himmler wanted to create a model of Aryan beauty, and to this end various real-life models were taken into consideration: athletes like Wilhelmina von Bremen, or actresses like Kristina Söderbaum. But the developers soon began to realize that there was no such thing as an "ideal" woman, and that the best thing to do would be to create the doll in a modular fashion, using the best part of each female model. The face was also a significant problem. The Danish doctor Olen Hannusen, Himmler's right hand man on the project, observed that sex was the doll's only purpose, and that it should in no way become "a substitute for the honourable mother at home"; its face should be an "artificial face of lust", reproducing a "common wanton's face". Chargeheimer also agreed that "the idea of beauty harboured by the SS might not be shared by the majority of our soldiers", and that "the vulgar could appeal to most ordinary men".

The creation of the face was entrusted to a sculptor, Arthur Rink. Pupil of the famed Arno Breker (1900-1991), Hitler's favourite sculptor, Rink – who had worked at the Hygiene Museum since 1937 – created 10 models for the doll's face, which were then assessed in psychological tests. Three models of different appearances and sizes were then implemented. According to Rink, called on as the only living witness to the *Borghild Project*, the first to enter production was model B: 176 cm tall, corresponding to the "Nordic Type", with small, easy to grasp breasts, and a blonde bob. The presentation of the prototype in Berlin was a success, and Himmler immediately ordered 50 dolls. But the war was taking a turn for the worse, and at the beginning of 1942 the project was interrupted. All the material records of the project appear to have been lost in February 1945, during the bombing of Dresden, which did not spare the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum.

Regardless of its authenticity, the modern day success of the Borghild Project, and the very fact that someone decided to dig it up (or, more probably, invent it from scratch), reveals the lasting appeal of Nazi history, and the problems that Germany – and the rest of the world – has in coming to terms with it. How much of our current technology is indebted to research performed by German industry between 1933 and 1945? As an erotic model has the "Nordic type" disappeared altogether, or is it still present in the fantasies of millions of internauts, attracted by the

SS-XXX
Die Frau Helga
The Borghild Project
Reconstruction



Janez Janša
SS-XXX | Die Frau Helga, the Borghild Project Reconstruction

P74 Center and Gallery, Ljubljana, 2008
Installation
Photo: Nada Žgank / Memento
Courtesy: Aksioma

proliferation of porn from North East Europe, and the model of the current silicone sex dolls? Have we overcome the trauma of Nazism, or does it actually still return to haunt many contemporary issues?

Janez Janša's reconstruction appears to be principally interested in these aspects of the project. The work appears to explore three parallel strands: "updating" the project using objects found or created as needed; "verifying its authenticity" by means of historic research and documentary proof, and "implementing" it by means of new details. It is significant that all of these approaches have been explored by those – journalists or enthusiasts – who picked up on the story.

For example, on 26 June 2005, *Clarín* reported some details which did not appear in the original source, such as the desire to preserve the purity of the Aryan race, and the fact that the doll would be carried in each soldier's pack: "The idea was that each soldier would carry a doll in his rucksack, along with the rest of the necessities vital for survival." [6] There appears to be a substantial amount of interpretation of the source material each time the story is told, even by journalists, who should by rights be as objective as possible.

In line with this Janez Janša, who explores the story in installation form, gives a face to those involved. He scoured antiques markets looking for historic images and documents attesting to the existence of various research projects, such as that into synthetic flesh, and that into Ipolex, one of the materials investigated for the

Janez Janša
SS-XXX | Die Frau Helga, the Borghild Project Reconstruction
8th Performance Art Festival Osijek, Croatia, 2008
Performance
Photo: Marin Franov
Courtesy: Aksioma

production of the doll. He found a face for "Helga" in an elegant art deco ornament; and developed Lenz's allusions to the life-like genitals and the research into the doll's synthetic voice, in a direction which is unpredictable, but still consistent with the project. For the installation he created a "military" gadget with a sexual orifice, which, when stimulated by the visitor, activates the doll's voice: the sound of a perfect orgasm that concludes with the forbidden verses of the German national anthem, the emblem of Germany's inability to come to terms with its past. As we know, the anthem – which was written in 1841 by August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben and set to music by Joseph Haydn – is now played minus the first two verses. Singing those verses represents an "apologia of Nazism". As it is easy to surmise, this is due less to its origins or literal meaning, and more to its history. *Das Lied der Deutschen* started life as a patriotic song and became the official anthem of the German republic in 1919. From 1933 to 1945 only the first verse was used, with its famed intro, "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles". When it was written this stood for the supremacy of the nation concept, but under the Nazi regime it ended up symbolising the supremacy of Germany over the rest of the world [7]. The result is that one of the most important countries in the European Union now has a truncated national anthem, due to what could be described as a successful re-enactment.
Die Frau Helga twists the knife in this wound, and like all the work by the Neue Slovenische Kunst (which Janez Janša would undoubtedly have in mind at this stage) sees the "re-actualization of the trauma" as the only way to get over it.
At the same time *Die Frau Helga* highlights the power of all acts of re-appropriation, a strategy that, on an artistic level too, must be tackled with great care.
Janša works with the ambiguities of re-enactments, reconstructions, re-appropriations and the like, playing on the common Latin root of the words tradition and betrayal (*tradere*, meaning to hand over, pass on, transmit). The story hinges on this ambiguity, due to the fact that the original event, though well documented, has been lost for ever. Or, in the words of Arthur Zmijewski: "if it happened only once it's as if it never happened." [8]

notes

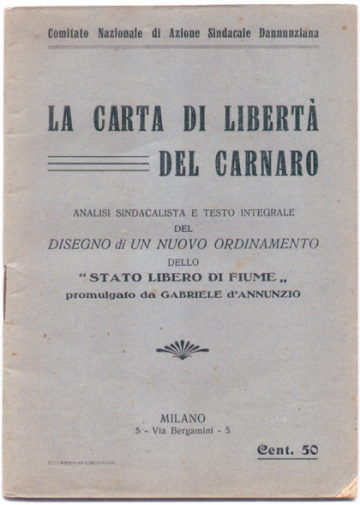
[1] Inke Arns, *History Will Repeat Itself*, in Inke Arns, Gabriele Horn (eds), *History Will Repeat Itself. Strategies of re-enactment in contemporary (media) art and performance*, exhibition catalogue, Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2007, p. 43.
[2] Ibid. pp. 59-60.
[3] Steve Rushton, "Tweedledum and Tweedledee resolved to have a battle (Preface One)", in Anke Bagma, Steve Rushton, Florian Wüst (eds), *Experience Memory Re-enactment*, Piet Zwart Institute 2005, pp. 5-12.
[4] www.borghild.de
[5] The quotes and contents that follow all refer to: Norbert Lenz, "The Borghild-project – a discreet matter of the III Reich", 2005, available online at http://www.borghild.de/indexe.htm
[6] Quoted in *Janez Janša. SS-XXX | Die Frau Helga*, a pamphlet produced on 29/11/2007 on occasion of the exhibition at the Galerija Nova, Zagreb.
[7] For more information, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Lied_der_Deutschen
[8] This quote was used as the name of an exhibition in 2005 at the Kunsthalle Basel; quoted in Arns 2005, p. 63.

Action #9
EFFORT
NAPORBEZNAPO
FATICA
MUHE
EYKAMATOS
ORAMUHELOSEMFATICASENZAFATIC
RAEFFORTLESS
SEYKAMATOSFATICASE
RIJEKA
RIJEKA
www.reakt.org/fiume

Janez Janša
Il porto dell'amore

"Everything in life depends upon the eternally new. Man must either renew himself or die."

—Gabriele D'Annunzio



The Carnaro Charter of Freedom

Syndicalist analysis and complete text of the proposal for a new order of the "Free State of Fiume" issued by Gabriele D'Annunzio
National Committee of Dannunzian Union Action
Milan, 1920

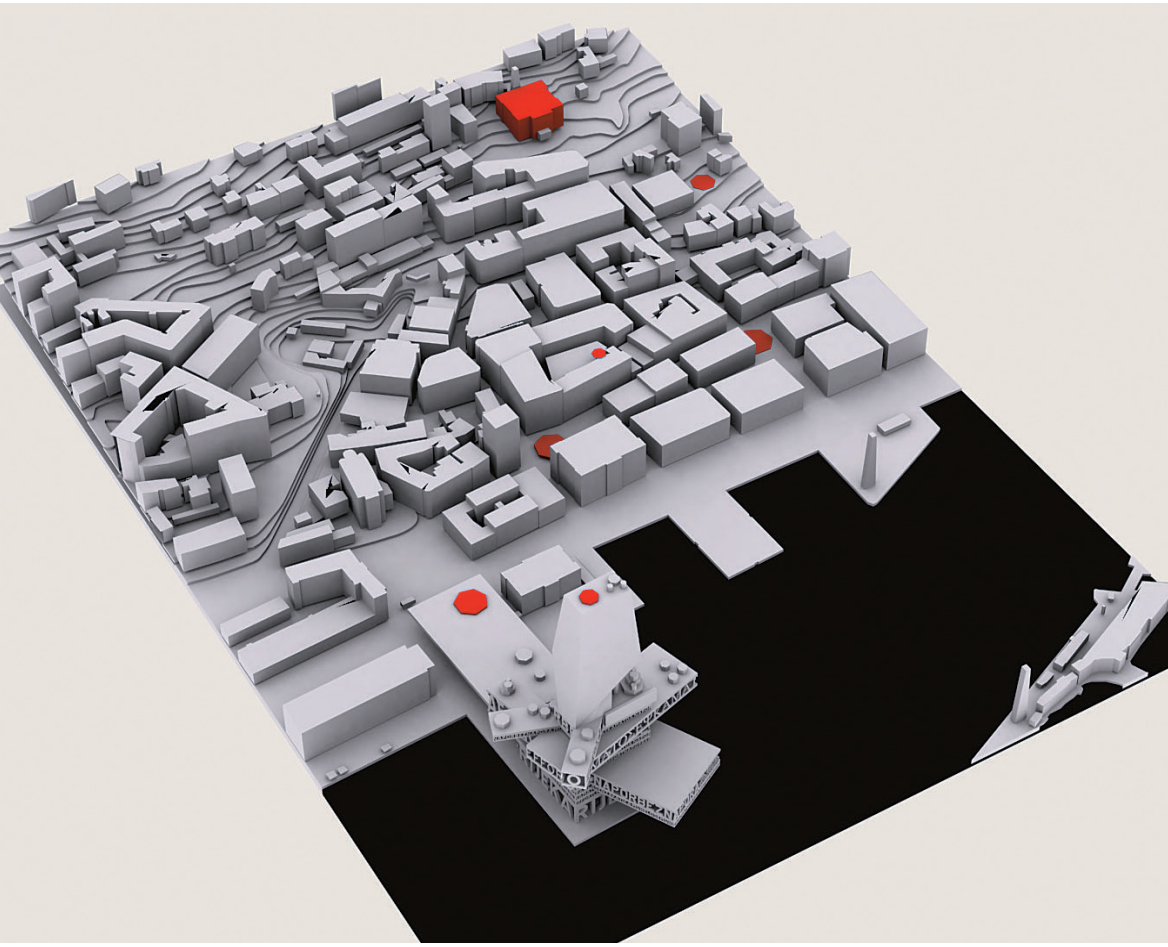
1919. At the end of the First World War, a large part of Italian society perceived the victory as "mutilated". Emblematic of this dissatisfaction was the situation of the town of Fiume in Istria, with a mainly Italian population [1], which had requested to be annexed to Italy in 1918. This sense of frustration later found an outlet in Fascism's promise of glory. In September 1919, Gabriele D'Annunzio – poet, intellectual and charismatic man of action – led a handful of deserters to seize the city on 12 September. They held it for almost 16 months, until the Italian government, after having attempted to solve the issue with mediation and by siege, opted for the military solution. Between 24 and 31 December 1920, the Italian army attacked Fiume, taking it from the legionnaires despite their strenuous resistance, not surrendering to an inevitable defeat. D'Annunzio christened these events Bloody Christmas.

The Fiume episode, however, has long been blighted by the shadow of Fascism: D'Annunzio was considered to be a forerunner to the Fascist movement, and there are some elements of effective linguistic, rhetorical and cultural continuity between Fiume and Fascism (from "Me ne frego!" to *Giovinezza*, to the spectacularization of politics, to the corporative structure of society), and lastly the fact that many exponents of the Fiume movement later joined Fascism (the Futurists in particular). This shadow has never entirely faded, despite the work of numerous intellectuals and historians who have attempted, documents in hand, to re-interpret the episode in its own right. This is an operation that starts from a distant perspective. As Lenin declared, "There is only one man in Italy capable of starting a revolution. D'Annunzio." And it was no coincidence that The Soviet Union was the only state that recognized the existence of Fiume. Institutional acknowledgement aside, the support for Fiume from the Dada Club in Berlin is also striking. The day after D'Annunzio captured the city, the club sent a telegram to the *Corriere della Sera*: "Conquest a great Dadaist action, and will employ all means to ensure its recognition. The Dadaist world atlas Dadaco already recognizes Fiume as an Italian city."

Janez Janša
Il porto dell'amore
Scale model, 2008
Digital render
Architect: Bor Pungerčič
Courtesy: Aksioma

But if we exclude these surprising reactions, we can see that it is above all in recent years that Fiume has begun to be treated with an attitude that differs from "irreverent underestimation" or "acritical apologia" [2]. Renzo De Felice led the way (1978), underlining the prevailing role played by the "firebrands" in the Fiume episode, the connection between revolution and celebration, and the predominance of a global driving force over purely local questions [3]. Other historians, from Nino Valeri (1967) to Michael Arthur Ledeen (1975), from Mario Isneghi (1994) to Günter Berghaus (1995), have variously underlined the radical, libertarian nature of the revolt, which was a melting pot of different ideologies, with a powerful vein of creativity and imagination, and characterized by a strong desire to intervene on all aspects of life [4]. Berghaus writes: "Between December 1919 and December 1920, Fiume became a little world of its own, a microcosm where radical dreams and aspirations were given an unprecedented chance to be lived out and experimented with... Groups of revolutionary intellectuals managed to assume control over the city and created a political culture, where spontaneous expression of beliefs replaced the tedious procedures of parliamentary democracy. Artistic fantasy and energy gave birth to a new 'aesthetics' of communal life, where the fusion of political and artistic avant-garde became a reality. A festive lifestyle replaced conventional social behaviour." [5]
Fiume also attracted the attention of the anarchist thinker Hakim Bey, who in his legendary essay T.A.Z. (1985), on temporary autonomous zones, describes Fiume as "the last of the pirate utopias (or the only modern example)" and "the first modern TAZ." He continues: "I believe that if we compare Fiume with the Paris uprising of 1968 (also the Italian urban insurrections of the early seventies), as well as with the American countercultural communes and their anarcho-New Left influences, we should notice certain similarities, such as: - the importance of aesthetic theory (cf. the Situationists) – also, what might be called "pirate economics," living high off the surplus of social overproduction – even the popularity of colorful military uniforms – and the concept of music as revolutionary social change – and finally their shared air of impermanence, of being ready to move on, shape-shift, re-locate to other universities, mountaintops, ghettos, factories, safe houses, abandoned farms – or even other planes of reality. No one was trying to impose yet another Revolutionary Dictatorship, either at Fiume, Paris, or Millbrook. Either the world would change, or it wouldn't. Meanwhile keep on the move and live intensely." [6]

Starting from this cluster of ideas, and a detailed examination of all the literary material produced by the protagonists in the Fiume undertaking, the Italian academic Claudia Salaris wrote her book *Alla festa della rivoluzione* (2002), which describes the Republic of Carnaro as a libertarian, aesthetic adventure. It was reading this book, and other first hand material, from the *Charter of Carnaro* to the



Music in the Charter of Carnaro

LXIV. In the Italian province of Carnaro, music is a social and religious institution. Once in a thousand or two thousand years music springs from the soul of a people and flows on for ever.
A noble race is not one that creates a God in its own image but one that creates also the song wherewith to do Him homage. Every rebirth of a noble race is a lyric force, every sentiment that is common to the whole race, a potential lyric; music, the language of ritual, has power, above all else, to exalt the achievement and the life of man. Does it not seem that great music has power to bring spiritual peace to the strained and anxious multitude?
The reign of the human spirit is not yet. 'When matter acting on matter shall be able to replace man's physical strength, then will the spirit of man begin to see the dawn of liberty': so said a man of Dalmatia of our own Adriatic, the blind seer of Sebenico. As cock-crow heralds the dawn, so music is the herald of the soul's awakening. Meanwhile, in the instruments of labour, of profit, and of sport, in the noisy machines which, even they, fall into a poetical rhythm, music can find her motives and her harmonies. In the pauses of music is heard the silence of the tenth corporation.

LXV. In every commune of the province there will be a choral society and an orchestra subsidized by the State. In the city of Fiume, the College of Aediles will be commissioned to erect a great concert hall, accommodating an audience of at least ten thousand with tiers of seats and ample space for choir and orchestra.The great orchestral and choral celebrations will be entirely free - in the language of the Church - a gift of God.

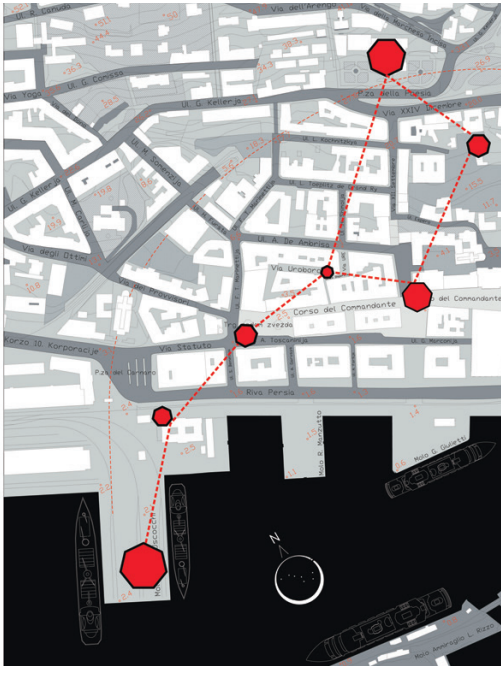
"Tu devi sapere che sei giunto in una città pericolosa per i tuoi giovani anni. Qui si fa senza alcun ritegno tutto ciò che si vuole. Le forme di vita più basse e più elevate qui s'alternano non altrimenti che la luce e le tenebre." (Giovanni Comisso, *Il porto dell'amore*, Treviso, Vianello, 1924; pag.12)

"Cortei e fiaccolate, fanfare e canti, danze, razzi, fuochi di gioia, discorsi, eloquenza, eloquenza, eloquenza... (...)
Mai scorderò la festa di San Vito, patrono di Fiume,
il 15 giugno 1920; la piazza illuminata, le bandiere, le grandi scritte, le barche coi lampioncini fioriti e le danze...:
si danzava dappertutto: in piazza, ai crocevia, sul molo; di giorno, di notte, sempre si ballava, si cantava (...) Sul ritmo delle fanfare marziali si vedevano turbinare, in scapigliati allacciamenti, soldati, marinai, donne, cittadini, ritrovanti la triplice diversità delle coppie primitive che Aristofane vantò". [Leon Kochnitzky]

text by Comisso, the title of which he then borrowed [7], that led Janez Janša to start on the long process which generated *Il porto dell'amore*. The connection between historiography and reconstruction of history should not come as a surprise: at times history, in order to be staged once more, must first be rewritten. At other times it is the reconstruction that rewrites history.
In actual fact, terms like "reconstruction" and "re-enactment" only partially describe *Il porto dell'amore*, which is a stratified, modular work based around a re-branding of the city of Fiume, including initiatives like the construction of a monumental interactive lighthouse in the port. And from the port area, the project spreads out through the narrow streets, winding up the hill, intersecting various references to the lost history of Fiume. Streets and squares are renamed and new features appear on the map of the city, such as the "Sacrarium of the Constitution", which holds a copy of a 1920 paperback edition of the *Charter of Carnaro*, the constitution of the liberated city. The new elements are laid out in the pattern of the Orsa Maggiore constellation, which is the emblem of the city in the coat of arms of the Italian Regency of Carnaro, designed

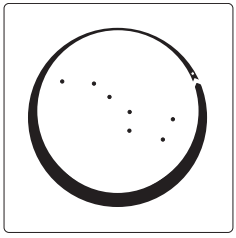
by Adolfo De Carolis from a sketch by D'Annunzio. This all seems to point to an act of historic revisionism in dubious taste, but there are a few details which indicate a rather different hypothesis.

The monumental lighthouse is a mobile, fragmented, joyful structure, well removed from the impenetrable monuments of Fascist architecture. It is a kind of architecture to be lived, that offers itself up to the variegated multitude of creative activities that went on in D'Annunzio's Fiume. Lastly, it is a construction that, like a minaret, is designed to convey a voice, broadcasting its message over the city and the sea every time a ship draws near. The voice recites articles from the *Charter of Carnaro*, the extraordinary constitution presented on 8 September 1920 when the Italian Regency of Carnaro was founded. Drawn up by the trade unionist Alceste De Ambris, the constitution was completed by D'Annunzio, who reinforced its utopian, and fundamentally literary nature, introducing the reference to music as a "religious and social institution", and adding the extraordinary tenth corporation, which is thus described: "The tenth has no special trade or register or title. It is reserved for the mysterious forces of progress and adventure. It is a sort of votive offering to the genius of the unknown, to the man of the future, to the hoped-for idealization of daily work, to the liberation of the spirit of man beyond the panting effort and bloody sweat of today."



Janez Janša
Il porto dell'amore

The re-branding logo and the new city plan, 2008
Architect: Bor Pungerčič
Courtesy: Aksioma



QUIS CONTRA NOS?
1919 - 2019

Janez Janša
Il porto dell'amore

MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art Bucharest, 2009
Installation (detail)
Photo: George Vasilache
Courtesy: MNAC

The planned Sacrarium of the Constitution pays tribute to this bizarre document, which mingles proto-Fascist components with undisputedly modern elements, libertarian, anarchist and democratic ideals, and a rare acknowledgement of the key role played by artists in society. By the same token, changing street names not only means paying homage to the city's glorious past: by having the names in Italian, English and Croatian, Janez Janša (and the architect Bor Pungerčič) highlight the openness and cultural pluralism of a state whose armed forces enjoyed decorating their uniforms with different symbols and multinational insignia (as the surrealist legend Jacques Vaché did); and which set up the League of Fiume to oppose the League of Nations, in defence of the weakest: oppressed races and peoples (including Native Americans and Afro-Americans), colonies and former colonies, and countries impacted by the Treaty of Versailles.

But more than a tribute to a historic moment that deserves to be recovered, or at least restored to authenticity, *Il porto dell'amore* actually feels like an act of love towards a place, that, at a certain point in its history, was hit by a wave of energy and poetry that no other place can lay claim to, and that its current guise of provincial town in a former Socialist country would never lead you to imagine. Fiume: Port of Love, City of Life, Universal Meeting Place, Great Opportunity, Fifth Season of the World, Rainbow City, Holocaust City, Quarnaro «Future Sea»!, "Fiume: Symbol, Hub, Pole, Rainbow! [...] A little of everything has come to you, divine Fiume: purity, ardour, courage, vanity, cocaine, faith, hypocrisy, false currency, voracity, sacrifice." [8] And: "In the crazed, despicable world, Fiume is the symbol of liberty; in this crazed, despicable world, there is one pure thing: Fiume; one truth: Fiume; one love: Fiume! Fiume is like a splendid lighthouse shining in a sea of baseness..." [9]. What other city in the world has ever merited such an avalanche of epithets? Il porto dell'amore does not re-enact the events, or celebrate them; it attempts to reproduce an atmosphere, a sensation, a dream of liberty that lies at an immeasurable distance from the present day world, just as it lay at an immeasurable distance from the world that surrounded it in 1919.

notes

[1] According to a 1910 census, in Fiume there were 24,000 Italians, 15,000 Croats and 10,000 inhabitants of other nationalities.
[2] I have taken these expressions from the introduction to Claudia Salaris' book, to which I also owe many references that follow: see Claudia Salaris, *Alla festa della rivoluzione. Artisti e libertari con D'Annunzio a Fiume*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2002.
[3] See Renzo De Felice, *D'Annunzio politico 1918-1938*, Roma-Bari, Laterza 1978.
[4] Nino Valeri, *Da Giolitti a Mussolini. Momenti della crisi del liberalismo*, Milan, Il Saggiatore 1967; Michael Arthur Ledeen, *D'Annunzio a Fiume*, Roma-Bari, Laterza 1975; Mario Isneghi, "La nuova Agorà. Fiume", in Isneghi, *L'Italia in piazza. I luoghi della vita pubblica dal 1848 ai giorni nostri*, Milan, Mondadori 1994. Works quoted in Salaris 2002, quoted.
[5] Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction*, 1909-1944, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 1995; p. 139.
[6] Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, Autonomedia Anti-copyright, 1985, 1991. Available online at the URL http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html
[7] Giovanni Comisso, *Il porto dell'amore*, Treviso, Vianello, 1924.
[8] Mario Carli, *Trillirì*, Piacenza, Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia della Società Tipografica Editoriale Porta, 1922; p. 165.
[9] Gabriele D'Annunzio, from excerpts of the speech published in the «Bollettino del Comando di Fiume d'Italia» n.2, 13 September 1919.

Fiume
RIJEKA

Action #10

www.reakt.org/saopaulo

Lucas Bambozzi
The Day São Paulo Stopped

"We live in a cynical society."

– Claudio Lembo
São Paulo governor, 2006

PCC member making a ransom demand for the kidnapped Globo TV reporter
São Paulo, May 2006
Photo: TV Globo

In 1993, some inmates of Taubaté prison (the maximum security jail of the state of São Paulo, 130 km from São Paulo city) founded an organization called Primeiro Comando da Capital, or PCC (First Command of the Capital). The PCC was supposedly an organization created to defend the rights of prisoners in the country, but it was actually something more than that. *Wikipedia* describes it as "an anti-establishment Brazilian prison gang and criminal organization" which, "since its inception, has been responsible for several criminal activities such as prison breaks, prison riots, drug trafficking, highway robbery and other supposed 'terrorist' activities." [1] The most impressive, among these criminal activities, were the attacks coordinated by the PCC in May 2006, held to be the largest wave of violence of its kind against security forces and civilian targets that ever happened in the history of Brazil.

Everything appears to start on 11 May, when a total of 765 members of the PCC were put into isolation in the Presidente Venceslau maximum security prison, in the attempt to cut their links with fellow gang members outside prison. Among these detainees was one of the leaders of the PCC – Marcos Williams Herbas Camacho, known as Marcola – who managed to avoid being interrogated, and using his mobile phone, succeeded in ordering the start of a rebellion which was intended to spread to the entire state of São Paulo. According to *Wikipedia*, on 12 May 2006, at 8 in the evening, "several attacks against police officers started, the 55th Police department was attacked by 15 cars and a police officer was killed near his house, in the eastern part of São Paulo. Four civil police officers, a prison guard, four civil guard members and a military were killed and other nine people were injured in 19 actions before midnight." [2] The next day the disorder spread to several prisons and the entire metropolitan area of São Paulo, but the police crack-down only came on 14 May.

On the same day, the number of rebel prisons rose to 71, while in the city numerous buses were set on fire, buses representing a vital means of transport for the population of São Paulo. The consequences of these attacks made their presence felt on Monday 15, the first working day following the start of the uprising.

Local people, terrified by the media reports (which possibly exaggerated the situation) and by what they saw on the streets, where possible avoided leaving their homes, buses did not circulate [3], and those who went to work by car tried to get home as early as possible. The result was unprecedented chaos, with residential areas resembling ghost towns and the big highways gridlocked by the most spectacular jams of the year. But by this point the situation was under control, and the violence had been stopped, though the final outcome was horrific: 141 dead (according to the most cautious estimates) and 53 injured, among police, criminals and civilians; 299 attacks against police stations, courts, banks and buses, and the largest city in Latin America brought to a standstill.

One of the most interesting aspects of the events in São Paulo was probably the role that the media played in the entire episode. This applies to the organization of the revolts, which were orchestrated by a handful of prisoners and their outside contacts by mobile phone, mostly using text messages and short pre-paid calls.

As for the mass media, while official communications of the event were handled very badly, the news of the uprising soon hit the international media, before ricocheting back to the local media, with the effect of making the situation appear even more serious than it actually was. The most remarkable thing about the episode, however, was the tactical ability demonstrated by the PCC in its use of means of communication to strike. As Lucas Bambozzi explains: "The media spectacle performed by the PCC scared media-artists, activists and net-producers. The PCC's perspicacity in the use of mobile technologies reverberates not merely as speech, but as a sort of extreme activism. The strategy of blocking mass transport produced a previously unseen impact on society. Its swarm effect has obscured most known models of mobilization, flash-mobs or any other expectation of massive use of the mobile network for greater social impact." It is a fact that, after Genoa and Seattle, after *Electronic Civil Disobedience* and "The ABC of Tactical Media", after Indymedia and Smart Mobs [4], activists now have to acknowledge that the most effective demonstration of the tactical use of means of communication, with the strongest impact on society and the mass media, was not theirs but that of a group of semi-literate criminals.

The Day São Paulo Stopped is a project that attempts to analyse this particular aspect of the events in São Paulo, and takes the form of a single flow of images: both "original" material, conveyed by the mass media or produced by those involved in the events, and material "reconstructed" by the artist for the occasion. The result is a series of videos which roll out different versions of the events, and which, when taken together, form a complex, fragmented, multi-faceted mockumentary.

Like Peter Watkins, Bambozzi mixes fiction and reality, making us wonder what is real and what is merely realistic, and at the same time he tries to attain a truth that goes beyond the spectacular nature of the episode, looking to the "plural" nature of an event that was driven by a large network of players, and followed by thousands of eyes motivated by different fears. In other words, rather than restaging the

Lucas Bambozzi
The Day São Paulo Stopped
2009
Digital picture
Courtesy: Diphusa digital media + art

events in all their spectacularity, and therefore emulating the panic effect elicited by the media during the event (which also interests him, as evinced by his reference to the radio programme *The War of Worlds* by Orson Welles), Bambozzi states that he is interested in: "unbalancing the predominance of simplistic views available online, addressing social and political aspects in the context of criminality."
This oversimplification seems out of place if we consider the events of May 2006 as a network of actions: *The Day São Paulo Stopped* therefore becomes a representation of the invisible, complex, reticulate flow of information that characterized the rebels' network, rather than the visualization of a series of dramatic actions.

But reducing *The Day São Paulo Stopped* to the status of docudrama or fake documentary would be superficial. In line with previous works like *Do Outro Lado do Rio* (2004) or *I Have No Words* (2000), in which the definitions between the drama and the given social reality are deliberately blurred, *The Day São Paulo Stopped* overlaps different genres. As the artist explains: "The idea of a fake documentary is indeed present in the project, as it is with most re-enactments. In this sense, the way I intend to work with actors would have some influence, in the way directors such as John Cassavetes or Abbas Kiarostami did. But I would rather relegate the basic elements of a 'drama', by emphasizing other approaches related to the Brazilian context and its social reality, which could be also referenced by genres such as the 'mockumentary', the 'fly-on-the-wall' strategy [5] (conducted by Frederick Wiseman for example), as well as the realism of a director such as Ken Loach."
The most interesting aspect of *The Day São Paulo Stopped* is probably the fact that, unusually for reeactment, the artist has chosen to work with a high profile historic event, comparable in scale to 9-11, that he himself experienced first hand, both directly and via the media. As he says: "I will never forget that 15th of May, which had a massive impact on the city's inhabitants, affecting not only certain areas but the majority of the city, due to the sudden and de-centralized nature of the attacks. What at first appeared to be just something 'on TV', started to produce impacts on

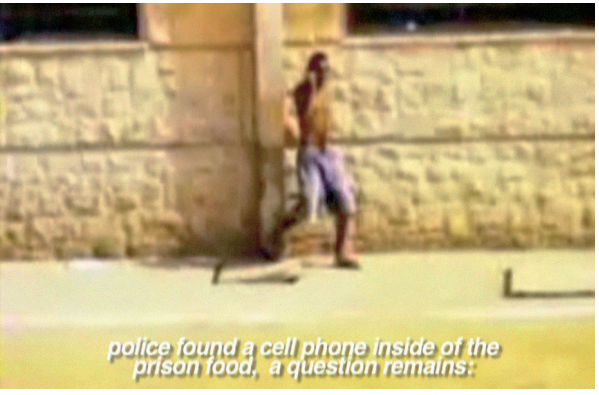
Lucas Bambozzi
The Day São Paulo Stopped
2009
Digital video
Courtesy: Diphusa digital media + art

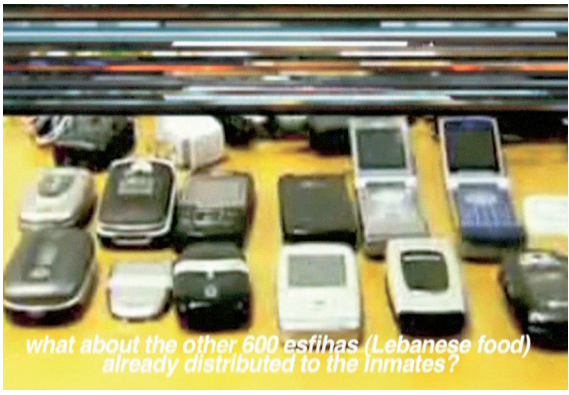
many levels, in all social layers (coming out 'from' TV). [...] Since most of the attacks were directed at the public transport system, the effects were progressive and escalated to the whole city, causing real trouble not only in the immediate environment of the attacks, but also to people living in far districts – who desperately wanted to return home. [...] Even though I was in a very privileged situation compared to those with long daily journeys (not to mention those who were victims of the attacks) none of us were blind to what happened around that day. Most working commitments during the day were called off, kids were asked to return home earlier from school, universities cancelled classes and huge traffic jams formed hours before the rush period. I was among those who suffered such 'light consequences', but I wanted to observe in depth other possible sides of the event, by recording statements, shooting empty roads and tuning into alternative radio stations and TV channels. The network really was a battlefield. While attacks were occurring simultaneously in different areas of the city, instant messages from multiple senders bombarded everyone's inboxes, stating different versions, showing shocking images and claiming to report on a new attack on a bus, bank or government institution. Statistics such as the number of victims rose minute by minute, not a result of further attacks but due to a huge media struggle for the most attention. Hoping to be able to go out in the streets safely, people would check the web for last minute news, looking for safety information. Instead, web sites reported mainly rumors, fake news about non-existent events each minute."

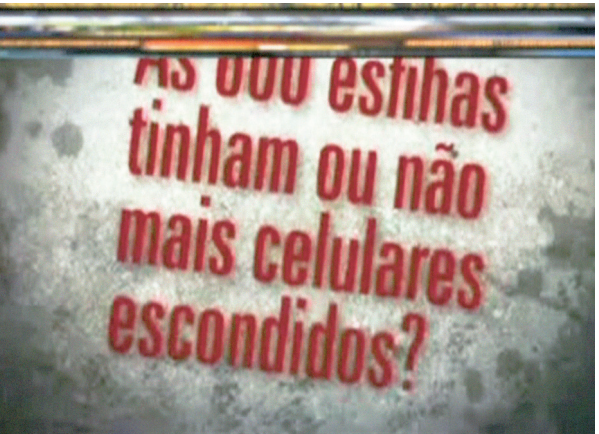
In other words, Bambozzi found himself in a similar position to the character in *Remainder* by Tom McCarthy [6], for whom a painstaking, obsessive reconstruction of events he has experienced is the only way to relive what he felt at the time, and at the same time, tune into his memories, explore them from every possible point of view, and if possible, understand them. Bambozzi, who spent the day shooting empty roads and tuning into alternative radio stations and TV channels, regains the events of 15 May by deploying their collective dimension: crowds walking along the railway tracks, an old man explaining the television news to a child, etc. And this inevitably entails the media, just as the media filtered most of the original experience.

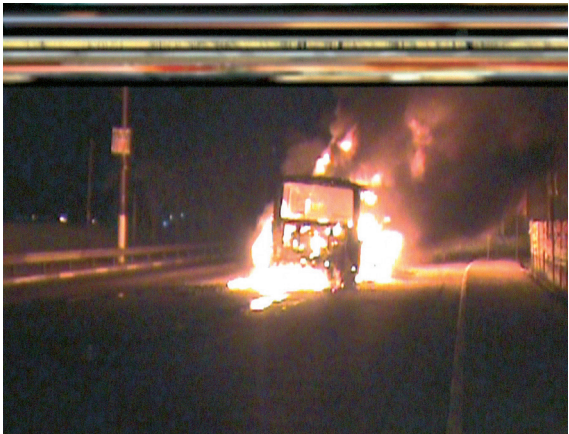
notes

[1] In *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primeiro_Comando_da_Capital
[2] In *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_S%C3%A3o_Paulo_violence
[3] In a city as enormous as São Paulo, where most people rely on public transport, the transport blockage played a decisive role in the handling of the revolt and its perception.And rather than stemming from fear and the spectacle of burning buses, the blockage was probably orchestrated on precise orders from the PCC, due to the fact that the gang also controls alternative means of transport such as van services - which were the first to stop running early in the day.
[4] Critical Art Ensemble, *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, Autonomedia, New York 1996; David Garcia, Geert Lovink, "The ABC of Tactical Media", in *Nettime*, May 16, 1997, available at the URL http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00096.html; Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*, Basic Books 2002.
[5] "Fly on the wall is a style of documentary-making used in film and television. The name derives from the idea that events are seen candidly, as a fly on a wall might see them. In the purest form of fly-on-the-wall documentary-making, the camera crew works as unobtrusively as possible; however, it is also common for participants to be interviewed, often by an off-camera voice." From *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fly_on_the_Wall
[6] Tom McCarthy, *Remainder*, Vintage Books, New York 2007.


police found a cell phone inside of the
prison food, a question remains:


what about the other 600 esfihas (Lebanese food)
already distributed to the inmates?


As 600 esfihas
tinham ou não
mais celulares
escondidos?



Action #11
www.reakt.org/in_the_long_run

IOCOSE
In The Long Run

"Every lie creates a parallel world: the world in which it's true."

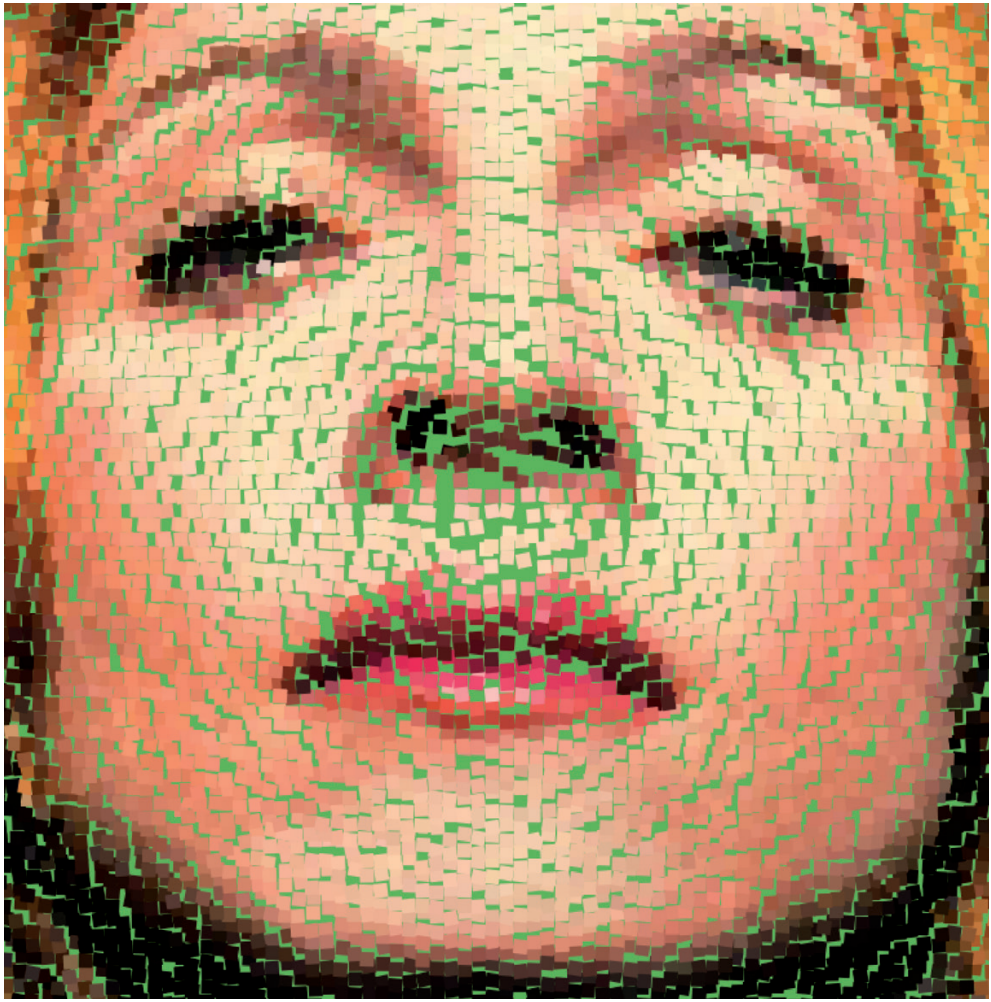
– Momus [1]

IOCOSE
In The Long Run
2010
Still from video
Courtesy: the artists

It opens with the signature music to the BBC News, followed by a touching portrait in images of the pop star Madonna. "Good evening. In this special edition we will look back at the unexpected death of one of the greatest pop artist of all times. This morning, at 3:47 am in New York City, Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone passed away", says an anchorman decked out in mourning. The start of *In the Long Run* (2010), the latest work from the Italian collective IOCOSE, is unequivocal: the video unequivocally reveals its status as an ambiguous artefact. Just what are we watching? A recording of an authentic BBC news item, and therefore the report of the death of Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone? An obituary prepped for the eventuality, somehow leaked from the broadcaster's archives? An artfully constructed fake? These hypotheses alternate in our minds for the length of the video, seeking confirmation or denial in the smallest details, in the slipups or inconsistencies in the video. The details regarding Madonna's death offered by the anchorman, and the report that follows lend weight to the hypothesis that this is a factual event, consequently reported on by the BBC, while the appearance here and there of "green screen", the background used for digitally editing images and videos or creating backdrops gives the impression of an "unfinished" product, made public before the finishing touches; lastly, habitual BBC viewers might wonder why, in all these years, they have never seen that particular reporter before, or why the company would have given an item of that kind to an office geek, clearly very self-conscious in front of the camera, rather than its top journo.

All of these doubts are resolved at the end of the long video, when a note of cognitive dissonance is introduced that gives the lie to all our hypotheses: after the final greeting ("We'll be back soon"), the opening notes of *Like a Virgin* play, while the presenter continues to speak. A few seconds later, the closing credits roll, informing

us that what we have just seen is the work of IOCOSE, produced by a Slovenian contemporary art institute and played by actors.
The fact that we experience this in an artistic context has the power to mitigate the feeling of uneasiness it generates. Art, after all, remains true to Aristotle's description: a trauma experienced in a context that removes the danger and renders it cathartic. In rhetorical terms, the trauma we are exposed to by *In the Long Run* is a possible event that has not actually happened, reported to us as if a real fact. Moreover, to achieve the "consistency of reality" *In the Long Run* adopts the narrative device of the "document", with an entirely realistic use of the mechanisms of a medium, that by our common consent, is authorised to tell us about reality: the television news.
Similar strategies have often been adopted by artists, directors and narrators to induce that suspension of disbelief that alone leads to catharsis, but only in a few cases has the mimesis been so complete that the ambiguity of the artefact actually becomes dangerous, creating drama.
The most sensational case was that of *The War of the Worlds*, the radio drama directed by Orson Welles and broadcast by CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System) in October 1938. The first 40 minutes of the show took the form of fictitious news flashes about aliens landing on the earth. Together with other elements (Welles' talent, the efficacy of the adaptation and the absence of commercial breaks) this induced a state of panic in an unknown number of listeners, convinced they really were being informed of the arrival of belligerent Martians. This happened despite the fact that the show was part of a series dedicated to theatre (the Mercury Theatre on the Air) and was an adaptation of a famous science fiction novel, *The War of the Worlds* (1898) by H. G. Wells. [2] The news report format and the medium with which it was broadcast were sufficient to transform an ambiguous artefact into a fact. Even now, listening to that recording sends a shiver down your spine that a "normal" work of art does not: which proves that an ambiguous artefact remains so over time, regardless of the fact that its true nature has been demonstrated.
A similar sensation arises when looking through the phoney *New York Times* that was distributed to passers-by by groups of activists on the streets of New York, on the morning of 12 November 2008. The action, orchestrated by a network that included the collective The Yes Men and the Antiadvertising Agency, had the political intent of eliciting the newly elected president Barack Obama to come through on his election campaign promises, and the artistic intent of causing a collective sigh of relief after the dark years of the George Bush Jr. administration: "Iraq war ends", ran the cover headline. [3]
With respect to these two examples, as I write *In the Long Run* is obviously missing one key element: a public response based the ambiguous artefact being accepted as fact for a given period of time. No-one has yet found themselves in the position of having to publicly deny Madonna's death, as happened in 1938 for the alien



IOCOSE
In The Long Run
2010
Courtesy: the artists

IOCOSE
In The Long Run
2010
Still from video
Courtesy: the artists

invasion and in 2008 for the end of the war in Iraq. This is not because IOCOSE is not capable of making the public believe in its falsification. Its brief but adventurous career demonstrates the contrary. In 2006 IOCOSE opened a site that invited compassionate visitors to adopt a dog in the third world. Though the project was a paradoxical and caustic satire on animal rights taken to extremes, on the one hand, and the hypocrisy behind many acts of compassion on the other, many visitors were taken in on both counts, believing it more opportune to adopt a mongrel from the favelas than a third world child. Two years later IOCOSE organised a virulent spamming campaign "in favour" of the Italian Partito Democratico (Democratic Party), an exposé of the progressive degeneration of political propaganda. The fallout from this came in the form of hundreds of emails lambasting the PD and its leadership candidate Walter Veltroni, showing just how credible the political use of spam is and, in the words of the artists, revealing the negligible difference between electoral rhetoric and Viagra adverts.

With *In the Long Run*, meanwhile, IOCOSE set about presenting a fake fragment of reality as an artistic original. Yet this does not make it any less dangerous, quite the opposite. Compared to a common or garden virus, a virus disguised as a vitamin has the undoubted advantage that it can be administered by a doctor. It can remain dormant, and survive for longer. And it can strike when we least expect it.

Let's come up with an example. I first encountered *In the Long Run* thanks to a series of fragments on Youtube. To work on the project together the four members of the group, all based in different parts of Europe, uploaded clips to an anonymous account, using random file names to guarantee invisibility while on this public platform. The first video, *123asd*, was merely a short excerpt of the third scene in the news studio, followed by the report on Madonna's life titled "Death of a Star".

IOCOSE
In The Long Run
2010
Stills from video
Courtesy: the artists

Across the bottom of the video, alongside circumstantial text such as "Madonna was born in 1958", ran technical indications such as "If ready check life file 2010.txt" and "More statement". There were no closing credits. Let's imagine a Madonna fan comes across the video. He is Portuguese and has never watched the BBC news. For him that short video is just one of the many fragments of reality that Youtube dishes up on a daily basis. Shocked, he posts the video to his Facebook page. Many of his friends are Madonna fans. One of them, a Canadian girl who also blogs about her idol, is a member of various groups and forums to keep up with all the latest Madonna news. The video does the rounds and gets people talking: "that journalist has never worked for BBC News", "no newspapers have published the news", "Perez Hilton has just published a photo of Madonna taken a week later" [4], "it was raining that night in New York", that kind of thing. But the more doubts grow over the authenticity of the video, the more the net community mobilises to find out who is behind it. Visits increase exponentially and the clip gets into the charts of Youtube's most watched videos. An editor at an American TV station notices it and, keen to be the first – or rather the second – to break the news, prepares a report for prime time airing. A fan sees it and in desperation throws herself off the 20th floor of the skyscraper where she works as a cleaner. Madonna's press people are forced to issue a statement declaring that the diva is alive and well. The relatives of the dead fan sue the BBC for manslaughter. Etcetera etcetera.

Obviously this is just one possible version of events, and a decidedly improbable one at that. Yet nothing prevents it from taking place. Perhaps it is already happening; it has already happened in many other cases. The phenomenon is known as an "Internet meme" [5], and could be described as "media objects" (for the most part videos) that would probably have been destined for invisibility and then for some bizarre reason go viral, becoming "facts" and contaminating other media, and at times even entering spoken language. If this does not happen to *In the Long Run* now, and in this way, it could always happen in the future. This possibility persists thanks to the concept of the opening quote: every lie creates a parallel world: the world in which that lie is true. The false news report of Madonna's death is but the start of a new story, a new trace that "in the long run", could have unexpected consequences.

At this point it might be legitimate to wonder: why, if they did not intend to circulate it as a lie, did they concoct such a credible fake? Herein, I think, lies the crux of the question, the core meaning of *In the Long Run*. The work springs from a dual consideration. On one hand, the Situationist mantra according to which reality has become an "immense accumulation of *spectacles*" [6], namely the idea that we actually experience a large part of what we define as reality in mediated form. This is now radically redefining the traditional relationship between reality and simulation, in forms even more extreme than those described by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulations* (1984). "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory" [7], Baudrillard wrote, describing the relationship between reality and its representation. Today, in the light of 9/11, the internet and virtual worlds, we are obliged to reconsider this relationship in any case. Today, the map has become part of the territory: the media is our reality, or at least a substantial part of it. [8]

It comes as no surprise, then, that much of the "reality" that the media offers up is prepackaged. Richard Grusin calls it "premediation". According to Grusin, "the logic of premediation [...] insists that the future itself is also already mediated, and that with the right technologies [...] the future can be remediated before it happens." [9] This phenomenon manifested itself in the badges that forecast the demise of the

IOCOSE
Domestic Standing Ovation
2011
Exhibition view at Aksioma Project Space, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Courtesy: the artists and Aksioma
Photo: JJ
Courtesy: Aksioma

Bush era, and that began to circulate long before the fateful date emblazoned on them ("1/20/09. The End of an Error"). Or the widespread practice in the press and TV of preparing celebrity obituaries long before the actual death takes place. The online encyclopaedia *Wikipedia* offers a long list of "Fidel Castro, Dick Cheney, Nelson Mandela, Bob Hope, Gerald Ford, Pope John Paul II and Ronald Reagan. [10] While the logic of remediation can help us understand the phenomenon of re-enactment, the logic of premediation can shed new light on the bizarre artefact that goes by the name of *In the Long Run*. The video "premediates" a future event that is already scripted, not only because death – that of Madonna, or anyone else – is inevitable; not only because in some television studio somewhere there is a programme that will be retouched and served up when it does eventually happen; but also because when it does the report will follow the IOCOSE format almost to the letter, as this is the standard formula used in these circumstances: the announcement of the death, the emotional commentary, an in-depth report on the sad event, the reactions of public figures, an analysis of the celebrity, his or her life and contradictions, and the reactions and comments of fans and admirers. Which means that the fact, in the minds of millions of viewers who follow it in the media without experiencing it directly, will take this exact form.
"We'll be back soon.

notes

[1] Momus, *The Book of Scotlands*, Sternberg Press, Solution 11 / 167, Berlin 2009.
[2] Among the most recent studies, cf. Richard J. Hand, *Terror on the Air!: Horror Radio in America, 1931–1952*, Jefferson, North Carolina, Macfarland & Company 2006.
[3] Cf. http://www.nytimes-se.com/.
[4] Perez Hilton is one of the best-known and most popular celebrity gossip websites.
[5] For some examples of memes, cf. the Internet Meme Database.
[6] Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*, Paris, Gallimard 1992.
[7] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, New York, Semiotext[e],1983, p. 2.
[8] Cf. Domenico Quaranta, "Reality is Overrated. When Media Go Beyond Simulation", in *Artpulse Magazine*, Issue 3, March – May 2010.
[9] Richard Grusin, "Premediazione", in *Duellanti*, n.8, luglio 2004. Cf. also Richard Grusin, "La fine di un errore", in *Rolling Stone*, 29 August 2008, available online at www.rollingstonemagazine.it/archivio/richard-grusin-la-fine-di-un-errore.
[10] Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_premature_obituaries.

Credits

#1 SilentCell Network
Ich Lubbe Berlin!
(p. 54)

Performance
Reichstag building, Berlin, Germany,
23 December 2005
Performer: Mare Bulc

Video
Camera: Janez Janša, Igor Štromajer
Editing: Igor Štromajer

Produced by
Intima Virtual Base, Aksioma, No-History, 2005
Executive producer: Igor Štromajer

#2 Janez Janša
Das KAPITAL
(p. 60)

Performance
Wenceslaw Square, Prague, Czech Republic,
7 October 2006
Performer: Mare Bulc
Hardware: Stefan Doepner

Video
Camera: Igor Štromajer, Janez Janša
Editing: Janez Janša

Co-produced by
Intima Virtual Base

#3 Janez Janša
C'était un rendez-vous (déjà vu)
(p. 66)

Video
Paris city centre, France, 19 – 22 May 2007
Camera: Janez Janša
Camera Assistant: Marcela Okretič
Logistics: Anne Roquigny
Tortoise care: Séségnon André Zézé

Web
Programming: Quentin Drouet
http://re-akt5.arscenic.org/C-etait-un-Rendez-Vous-deja-vu

Installation
PD and Arduino programming: Quentin Drouet
Electronics: Quentin Drouet
Display: RPS d.o.o.
Armour shell design: Matija Milkovič Biloslav, Andrea Kršul

Co-produced by
Arscenic, Paris

#4 Vaginal Davis
VD as VB - Erdgeist, Earth Spirit #27-29 10827
(p. 74)

Performance
Kapelica gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 21 June 2007
Performer: Vaginal Davis
Original music: Tim Blue - the Cheap Kollective, Berlin

Video
Camera and editing: Janez Janša

Installation
Photos: Nada Žgank/Memento

Co-produced by
City of Women Festival and Kapelica gallery

Vaginal Davis
The Madonna of Laibachdorf

Photo session
Alkatraz gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 19 June 2007
Photo: Nada Žgank/Memento
Makeup artist: Metka Megušar Bizjan

Co-produced by
City of Women Festival and Alkatraz gallery

#5 Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav
(p. 84)

Performance
Mount Triglav, Slovenia, 6 August 2007

Pictures
Photo: Gaia Repe
Triptych: Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša

Co-produced by
Maska - institute for publishing, production and education,
Ljubljana and Zavod Masa

#6 Janez Janša
Slovene National Theatre
(p. 92)

Performance
Director: Janez Janša
Performers: Aleksandra Balmazović, Dražen Dragojević,
Janez Janša, Barbara Kukovec / Irena Tomažin, Matjaž Pikalo
Sound design: Boštjan Narat
Video: Janez Janša
Camera: Janez Janša, Andrea Keiz
Video graphics: Andrej Intihar
Technical director: Igor Remeta

Installation
Performer: Janez Janša
Video: Janez Janša
Camera: Janez Janša, Andrea Keiz

Sound: Brane Zorman
Voice: Miha Žlicar, Tina Škoberne
Installation design: Janez Janša, Janez Janša

Produced by

Maska - institute for publishing, production and education, Ljubljana, 2007

Co-produced by

Aksioma and Old Power Station – Elektro Ljubljana
Executive producer: Barbara Hribar
Post-production: Tina Dobnik

#7 **Eva and Franco Mattes**
aka 0100101110101101.org
Reenactment of Marina Abramović and Ulay's Imponderabilia (p. 98)
(In the context of *Synthetic Performances* in Second Life, 2007)

Performance

Artists Space, New York and Odyssey, Second Life,
13 November 2007
Curator: Benjamin Weil
SL hosting: Sugar Seville, Beavis Palowakski, Odyssey
In the frame of the visual art performance biennial
PERFORMA07, New York, USA

Video

Video documentation: Amy Owen, Electronic Arts Intermix
Live director: Paolo Ruffino

#8 **Janez Janša**
SS-XXX | Die Frau Helga
The Borghild Project Reconstruction (p. 106)

Designer: Dejan Dragosavac Ruta
Voice: Irena Tomažin
Sound: Aldo Ivančić
Hardware: Stefan Doepner

Co-produced by

KONTEJNER | bureau of contemporary art praxis, Zagreb

#9 **Janez Janša**
Il porto dell'amore (p. 116)

Architect: Bor Pungerčič
Voice: Hana Batistič and Ed Rossi
Sound: Janez Janša
Scale model: RPS d.o.o.

Co-produced by

Drugo More, Rijeka

#10 **Lucas Bambozzi**
The Day São Paulo Stopped (p. 124)

São Paulo, Brazil,
December 2008 – January 2009
Creative assistant: Paloma Oliveira
Performers: 100 citizens of São Paulo
Video: Lucas Bambozzi
Camera: Lucas Bambozzi, Paloma Oliveira, Lucas Gervilla
Editing: Lucas Bambozzi, Paloma Oliveira

Co-produced by

Diphusa Digital Media + Art, Brazil
Producer: Paloma Oliveira

#11 **IOCOSE**
In The Long Run (p. 130)

Written and directed by IOCOSE
TV Journalist: Charles Delaney
Guest: Chandrika Chevli
Voice over: Samantha Baines, Matthew Williams
Editor: Mario Marrone
Graphics: Chiara Cerutti
Studio assistant: Olga Koroleva
Script assistant: Kate Sarah Graham
Extras: Mihaela Brebenel, Carla Cruz, Raphael Faeh, Giona Fiorentino, Thomas Gualtieri, Erin Maxon, Martin Solgaard Andersen
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Executive producer: Marcela Okretič

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SS-XXX | Die Frau Helga -
The Borghild Project Reconstruction
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Il porto dell'amore
additionally supported by the Municipality of Rijeka.

(*) except if otherwise stated

RE:akt!
Reconstruction, Re-enactment, Re-reporting
www.reakt.org

exhibition

Curator Domenico Quaranta

Coordination Oana Tanase, Bucharest; Alenka Gregurič, Ljubljana; Nataša Ivančević, Rijeka; Meta Kordiš, Maribor

Setup Janez Janša

Technical director Jure Sajovic

22 January – 13 March 2009

mnac
National Museum of Contemporary Art
Bucharest, Romania
www.mnac.ro

25 March – 17 April 2009

ŠKUC gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia
www.galerija.skuc-drustvo.si

22 May – 21 June 2009

m m s u
Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art,
Rijeka, Croatia
www.mmsu.hr

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Brad Troemel, *Peer Pressure*, 2011
Kevin Bewersdorf, *Spirit Surfing*, 2012
Mathias Jansson, *Everything I shoot Is Art*, 2012
Domenico Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, 2013

In My Computer

Miltos Manetas, *In My Computer # 1*, 2011
Chris Coy, *After Brad Troemel*, 2013
Martin Howse, *Diff in June*, 2013
Damiano Nava, *Let the Right One In*, 2013

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by Josephine Bosma, Gene McHugh, Joanne McNeil, D. Quaranta

Gazira Babeli, 2011.
Exhibition catalogue. Edited by Domenico Quaranta,
with texts by Mario Gerosa, Patrick Lichty, D. Quaranta, Alan Sondheim

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Exhibition catalogue. Edited by Yves Bernard, Domenico Quaranta

Ryan's Web 1.0. A Lossless Fall, 2012.
By Ryan Trecartin

RE:akt! Reconstruction, Re-enactment, Re-reporting, 2014.
Exhibition Catalogue. Edited by Antonio Caronia, Janez Janša, Domenico Quaranta,
with texts by Jennifer Allen, Jan Verwoert, Rod Dickinson

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Edited by Joanne McNeil
Co-produced with Rhizome, New York (USA).

The F.A.T. Manual, 2013.
Edited by Geraldine Juárez, Domenico Quaranta.
Co-produced with MU, Eindhoven (NL).

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Just what is it that leads many contemporary artists to restage historic events great and small, performances of the past, and sometimes even imaginary events? Are they possessed by the post-modern demon? (albeit belatedly...)
Does this practice spring from a cynical awareness of the decline of values, the surrender – be it dismal or joyful, it makes little difference – to the logic of the society of spectacle? Is it yet another variation of Francis Fukuyama's bitter prophecy of "the end of history"?
Or is it simply the end of the modern myth of the "originality" of the work of art, a further confirmation of the fact that in conceptual art the process is more important than the end product, and an attempt to find a different, deeper path to critique the medial ideology of contemporary society?

RE:akt! Reconstruction, Re-enactment, Re-reporting sets out to offer some answers, albeit not exhaustive or definitive, to these questions linked to the artistic practice of re-enactment and its possible redefinition.
Through the texts of critics, theorists and artists such as Jennifer Allen, Antonio Caronia, Rod Dickinson, Domenico Quaranta and Jan Verwoert, and through works by Lucas Bambozzi, Vaginal Davis, IOCOSE, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Eva and Franco Mattes (aka 0100101110101101.ORG) and SilentCell Network, the book seeks to explore the relationship between the historical, social and linguistic aspects of re-enactment, and the meaning of this practice, against the background of the history of performance and the increasing mediation of life.